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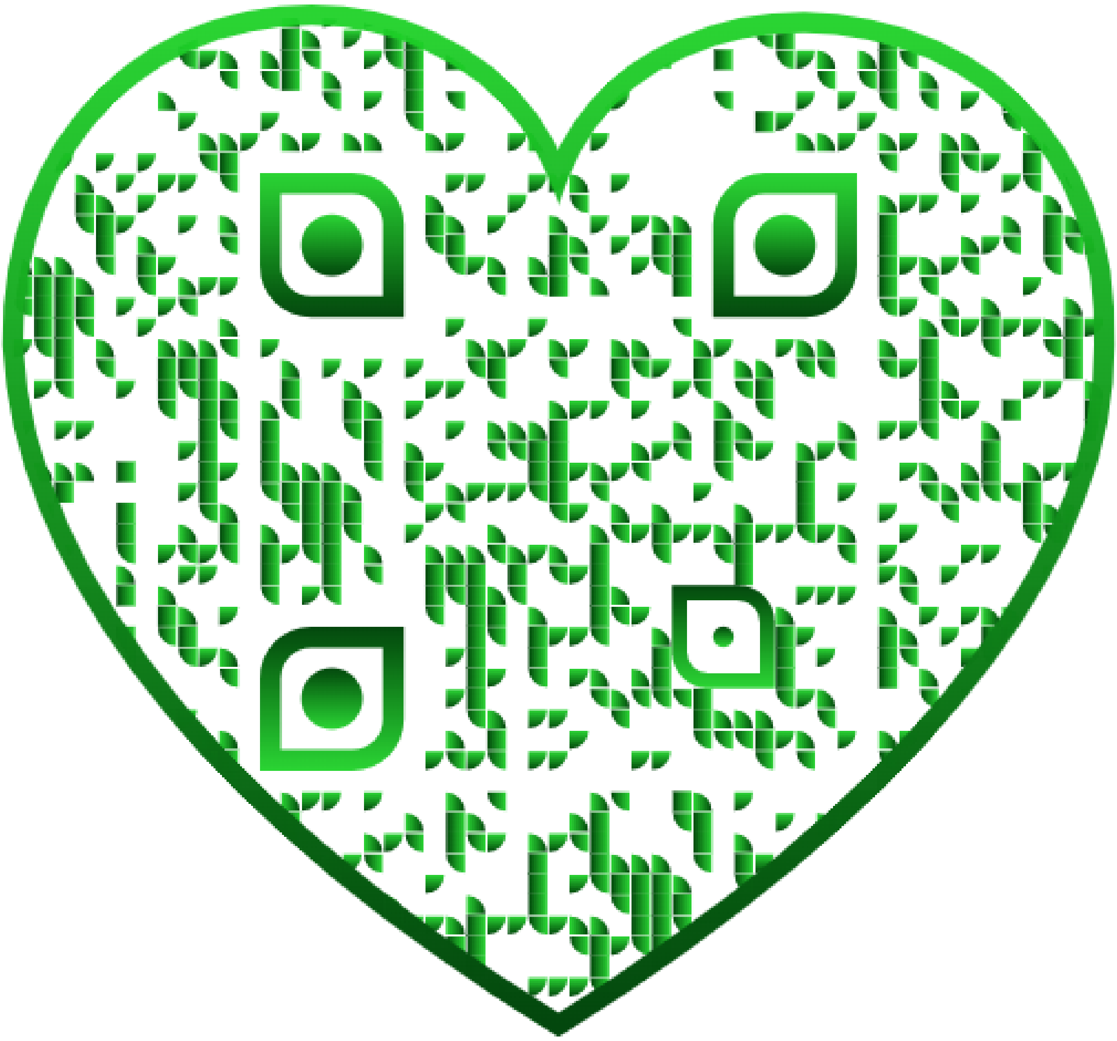

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WHAT CAR? CAR OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2024
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WHAT CAR? CAR OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2025
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COMMENT

AUDI IS ABOUT TO REDEFINE ITS FUTURE ALL OVER AGAIN

“What you see now is what you’ll get. It will be as identical to the concept car as possible.” That quote from an Audi designer could be about the Concept C, which previews a new brand-shaping sports car due in 2027. But it was actually made about the concept for the transformative first-generation TT back in 1996.

When the TT arrived, it was a genuine Bauhaus bolt from the blue, standing in stark contrast to the rest of the brand’s line-up. And while the two-seater was always a niche offering sales-wise, it fortified Audi’s reputation for performance and design by delivering that ‘concept car made real’ promise.

Nearly 30 years later the Concept C, unveiled last month, carries the same promise: a halo model that will reinvigorate Audi. And this time the firm has gone further: as I discovered in a UK exclusive drive this week (p46), the Concept C is already far more than a show car.

That was clear from talking to Audi boss Gernot Döllner, who spent 45 minutes showcasing the Concept C’s potential to me on the road. Such unfettered access to a CEO is rare and underpins just how important this car is to Audi. It will never deliver the sales volume of Audi’s SUVs or saloons, but that’s not the goal: brands need halo cars, and the Concept C is an amazing statement of intent.

James Attwood, associate editor
james.attwood@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

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Meet Nissan GB’s boss

Felix Page joins James Taylor (no, not that one), the new MD of Nissan GB, to talk about a make or break time for the company.

Solterra races WRX STI

In the Impreza’s pomp, it would have been unimaginable for one of Subaru’s family SUVs to beat it in a drag race. Yet can it?

Weird world of microcars

In the 1950s a short-lived niche industry for microcars popped up – and it caused a ripple effect that would endure.

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“While its owners had been successful in the sack, they had given up on other areas of life” p18

AUTOCAR
Issue 6695 | Volume 326 | No 8

NEWS

Volvo’s trailblazing electric EX60 4
Two Alpine drop-tops due by 2030 6
Details of new £2.5m Rolls Phantom 8
Hardcore Panamera on the way 10
ICE revamps vital to Seat’s future 12
How will Ford win back Europe? 14
New life for petrol Giulia and Stelvio 16

FIRST DRIVES

Ferrari 296 Speciale 24
Honda Prelude 28
Porsche 911 Turbo S 30
Seat Ibiza 32
Alfa Romeo Tonale 33
BMW M2 CS 34
Vauxhall Frontera Hybrid 145 36
Smart #5 Pro 37

ROAD TEST

MG IM6 100 Long Range 38

FEATURES

New-era TT driven with Audi’s CEO 46
Bespoke, 7.7 litres and built in UK 52
McLaren track day at Silverstone 54

LONG-TERMERS

Volkswagen Tayron 56
Jaecoo 7 57
Renault 5 58
Volvo EX30 59

COLUMNS

Jesse Crosse 13
Mark Tisshaw 15
Steve Cropley 17
Matt Prior 18
Damien Smith 19
Testing, testing 45
Why I love... 74

EVERY WEEK

Your Views 20
How to subscribe 22
Access 130 years of Autocar 44
Lost in the archive 65
Road test results 67

USED CARS

Dacia Sandero buying guide 60
My car & I 62
Caught in the classifieds 63

24 NEW FERRARI 296 SPECIALE RATED

46 AUDI CEO AND PIVOTAL NEW CAR

NEWS

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NEW EX60 TO BLAZE A TRAIL FOR VOLVO EVs

Electric SUV will be launched in January with game-changing tech

Volvo's crucial EX60 will be unveiled in January next year as a key model for growing its electric sales, while also introducing a raft of important new technology for the company.

Set to rival the recently revealed BMW iX3 and Mercedes-Benz GLC EQ, the electric family SUV will be the first Volvo to use a highly scalable EV-only platform – developed in-house – that will be adapted for all future Volvo and Polestar EVs.

Volvo boss Håkan Samuelsson said the EX60 has been "designed and developed in Gothenburg" and "can't get much more Swedish". It will be the second model launched since he retook control of the Geely-owned car maker in April, following previous CEO Jim Rowan's departure, and is integral to the next stage of its electric push.

As the EV counterpart to Volvo's best-selling XC60, the EX60 is a high-stakes model for the company as the first time it has offered an EV in the fastest-growing premium segment. The XC60 currently accounts for 34% of Volvo's global sales – and 27% in Europe, a key market for the SUV.

In addition to helping transition some XC60 drivers to electric, the EX60 will plug the gap in Volvo's EV line-up between the smaller EX40 and larger EX90 SUVs.

Like the rest of Volvo's range, the EX60 will look very similar to its combustion sibling, which was itself refreshed earlier this year, no doubt in a bid to align it more with the upcoming EV.

Based on Volvo's preview images, the EX60 will differ from the XC60 in adopting a grille-less front end, the EX90's 'Thor's hammer' headlights and a slightly slipperier body to aid efficiency. Its dimensions will broadly match those of the XC60.

It could be a similar theme inside. The current XC60's cabin is centred around an 11.2in screen that houses most of the car's controls and is paired with a 12in driver display – a combination also used by the XC90. But the EX60 is likely to follow the set-up used in the EX90, with its

Volvo revealed the EX60's front styling in this factory shot

AUTOCAR
IMAGE

Aero-honed EX60 will shun a grille and get EX90-style lights

"The EX60 is one of Volvo's most important new cars in a generation"

more advanced 14.5in and 9in displays.

Volvo will be looking to the EX60 to give its EV sales an important boost as it, like other car makers, battles to hit increasingly stringent legislative targets.

Its European EV sales for 2025 to the end of September were down 32% (32,793 cars) on the same period in 2024, when sales were buoyed by the arrival of the EX30 – now Volvo's best-selling EV – and notable updates to the EX40 and EC40. In the UK, Volvo is currently 6.4% short of the mandated 28% EV sales mix for 2025.

The EX60 will face tough competition from premium rivals including the Audi Q6 E-tron and Tesla Model Y, as well as the new iX3 and GLC EQ. However, Volvo says the SPA3 architecture that underpins it will provide it with standout capabilities.

Signalling the car's importance within the wider group, the EX60 will be the first Volvo or Polestar model to use the SPA3 platform, which has been created from the ground up as an electric-only architecture to enable Volvo to add both smaller and larger cars to its line-up.

The platform is effectively a successor to the SPA2 architecture used by the ES90 and EX90 EVs launched this year. The platform is unrelated to the Geely-shared SEA employed by the EX30 crossover.

Volvo engineering and technology chief Anders Bell has told Autocar that SPA3 is much more efficient from an EV perspective than SPA2 because "we've been able to remove all the old constraints of the combustion engine".

He added: "We very much took a first-principles approach to it. You will see the highest level of supremely well-integrated technology coming together in these products."

Among the new features introduced as part of the SPA3 architecture are cell-to-body battery packs with next-generation density and performance, as well as in-house-developed electric motors.

As a result, said Volvo, the EX60 will be the longest-range EV it has built to date. Given its current longest-range model is the ES90, with 435 miles, the incoming SUV is likely to push closer to the iX3's 500 miles – the most range offered by any EV currently on sale.

Details of the EX60's battery packs have yet to be disclosed, although SPA3 is said to be capable of accommodating a wide range of battery sizes. But given the new architecture's packs will be denser and the EX60 is not as large as the ES90, the EX60 is likely to use a battery smaller than the saloon's 106kWh unit – the biggest Volvo currently offers.

Further technical specifications, such as motor power, remain under wraps, but the EX60 is expected to be offered in single-motor and dual-motor configurations, in line with Volvo's other EVs. As with the EX90, a dual-motor set-up is likely to be launched first.

The EX60 will also be a software-defined vehicle, like the EX90 and ES90. At its core will be an advanced software stack, which will allow over-the-air updates and new features to be unlocked over time. Volvo plans to launch four major software upgrades per car per year, alongside its regular updates.

Bell said SPA3 is "a big step from a mechanical perspective, but from a software electronics perspective it's a straight evolution". He added: "Our focal point is safety, sustainability and creating this fantastic customer experience, all wrapped in this Scandinavian design, on one tech stack."

The EX60 will also be the first Volvo built with the aid of megacasting, a technology that will be incorporated with the SPA3 platform. Megacasting enables significant car sections to be produced as a single component, rather than multiple parts. Tesla uses this technique for the Tesla Model Y and Honda will employ it on its next generation of EVs, previewed by the Series 0 concepts.

This approach and the more modular nature of SPA3 will lower production costs, said Volvo. As a result, the EX60 could become the first Volvo EV to be priced at the same level as its combustion sibling, in this case £48,000. Other electric models are typically around £10,000 more than their combustion equivalents.

WILL RIMELL

EX60 will be the EV sibling of the XC60 best-seller (pictured)

VOLVO HAS TO GET THIS ONE RIGHT

JAMES ATTWOOD

The venerable XC60 remains by far Volvo's biggest seller. In the past year, the firm has sold more examples of the seven-year-old SUV than all of its electric models combined. That shows why the company has backed away from previous commitments to be EV-only by 2030.

Volvo is still committed to electrification and the opportunities within the biggest segment of the premium EV market are massive. Which is exactly why it has waited until now for the EX60: it can't afford to get this wrong.

Its early bespoke EVs have shown promise but they've been beset by software and usability issues, which absolutely can't happen with a car this important. So it's notable that the firm hasn't played it safe. The EX60 uses a new platform, new manufacturing techniques and new software.

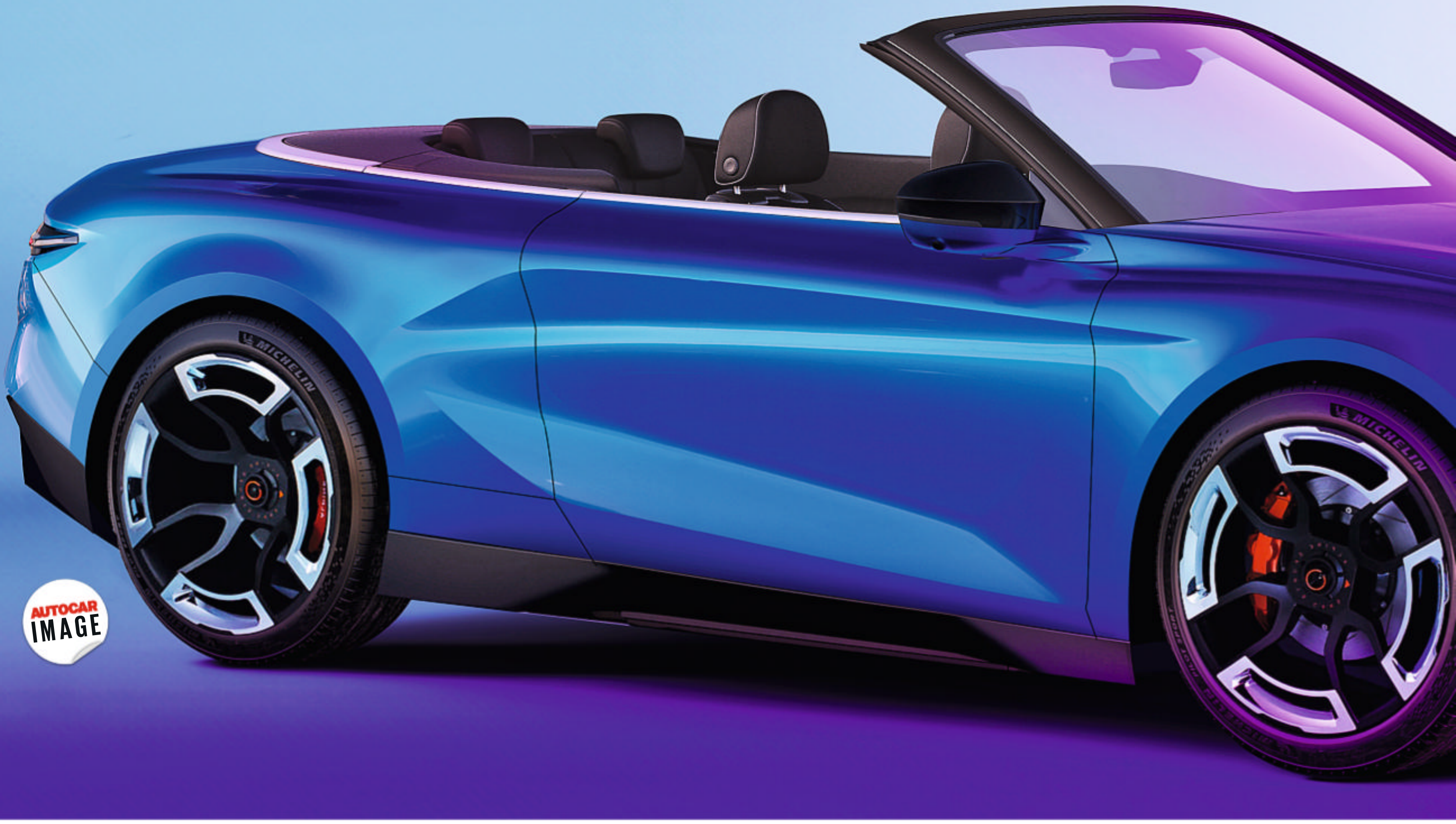
It's the dilemma facing car firms in this awkward transition era: technology is moving too fast to sit back, yet the competition is too intense to get things wrong. Which creates another challenge for Volvo: when XC60 buyers are willing to fall back on a dependable, familiar option, can the firm persuade them to try the EX60's innovative tech?

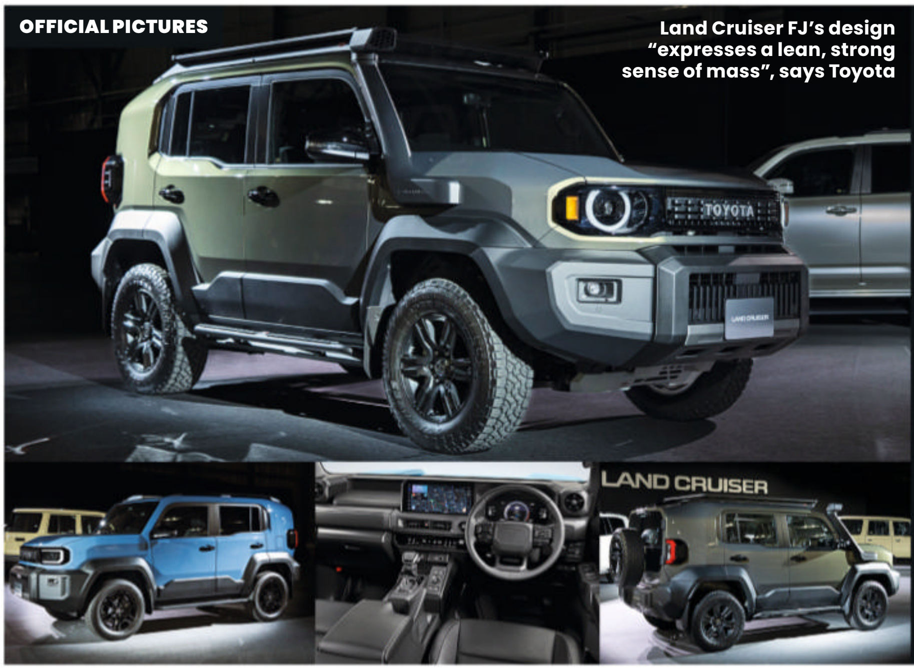
ALPINE PROMISES TWO NEW ELECTRIC CONVERTIBLES

Brand to expand with drop-top next-gen A110 sports car and all-new A310 GT

Alpine will have two convertibles in its line-up by 2030, with plans for drop-top versions of both its next-generation A110 sports car and its forthcoming Porsche 911-rivalling fastback GT.

The Renault Group's performance brand is in the process of building a line-up of seven electric-only models by 2030. To that end it has already launched the A290 hot hatch and the A390 crossover.





OFFICIAL PICTURES

Land Cruiser FJ's design "expresses a lean, strong sense of mass", says Toyota

NEW BABY LAND CRUISER SETS SIGHTS ON DEFENDER 90

TOYOTA HAS REVIVED the historic FJ model name for a long-awaited baby version of its flagship Land Cruiser 4x4, revealed in production form ahead of a launch in Japan next year.

The Land Rover Defender 90-sized off-roader has been created as a new entry point to the Land Cruiser range and has been designed to open it up to a wider range of buyers and a "new generation" of customers, said Simon Humphries, Toyota's chief branding officer.

The Land Cruiser FJ (which now stands for 'Freedom and Joy', according to Toyota) is based on the same platform as the full-sized Land Cruiser, but its wheelbase is 270mm shorter. Overall, it stands 4575mm long, 1855mm wide and 1960mm tall – a close match for the Defender 90.

Full specifications

The second-generation A110 will arrive next year as an electric successor to the current eight-year-old petrol-engined model, sitting on the new Alpine Performance Platform (APP) and offering both coupé and roadster bodystyles.

That bespoke sports car architecture allows the two new Alpine EVs to employ in-wheel motors, similar to those seen on the Renault 5 Turbo 3E mega-hatch, but the French firm hasn't yet confirmed plans to put this technology (developed by British specialist Protean) into series-production cars.

The APP will also be used for a fastback GT, which is tipped to be called the A310, and Alpine has now confirmed that the four-seater will also be offered in both fixed- and folding-roof forms.

While Alpine has offered no firm details of the A310, it is expected to be aesthetically very similar to the new A110, which is set to move away from the retro cues of the current model to a futuristic new look that's more closely aligned with the A390.

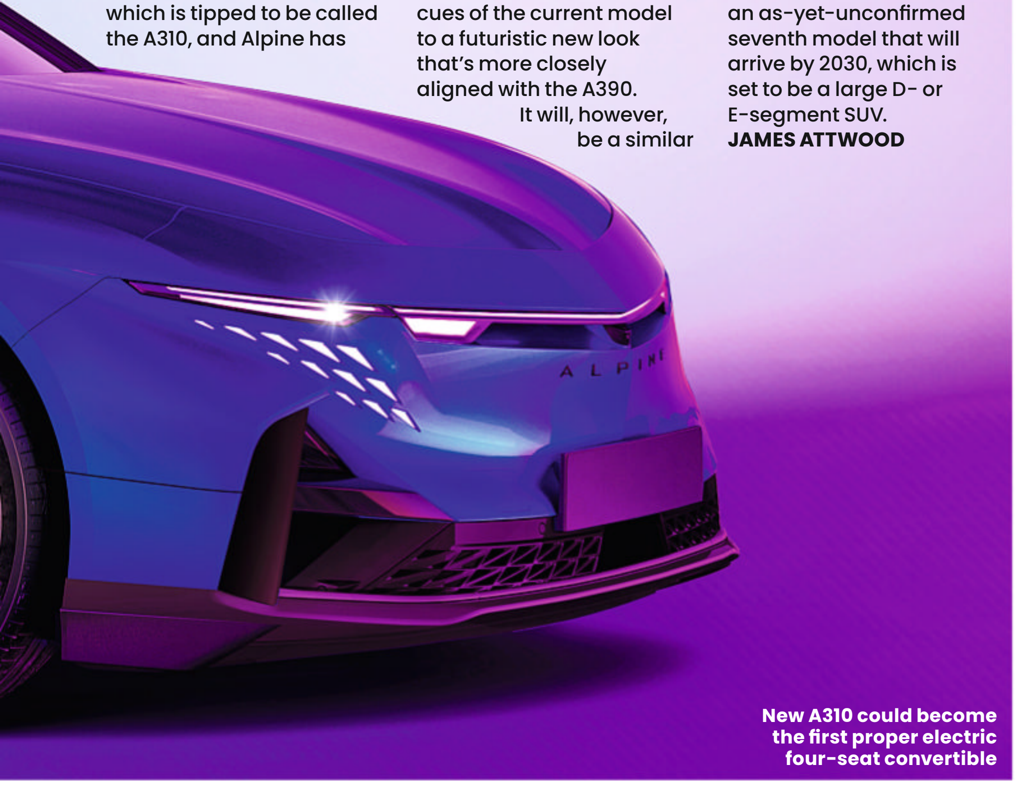
It will, however, be a similar size to today's petrol car.

Alpine UK's general manager, Nicola Burnside, described the electric A110 as the start of the "next chapter", adding: "It looks good, and it does look like an A110 should."

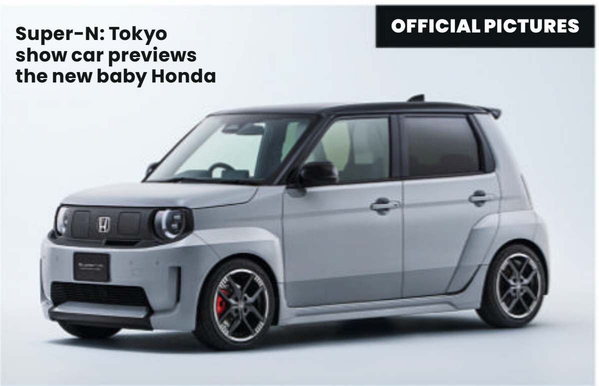
Beyond the two sports cars, Alpine is working on an as-yet-unconfirmed seventh model that will arrive by 2030, which is set to be a large D- or E-segment SUV.

JAMES ATTWOOD

New Alpine EVs could feature 5 Turbo 3E's in-wheel motors



New A310 could become the first proper electric four-seat convertible


Super-N: Tokyo show car previews the new baby Honda

OFFICIAL PICTURES

HONDA WILL BRING SPORTY ELECTRIC CITY CAR TO UK

HONDA WILL LAUNCH a new electric city car next year, designed to appeal to driving enthusiasts with a simulated gearshift system – and it will be offered in the UK.

The Renault Twingo rival has been closely previewed at the Tokyo motor show by the new Super-N prototype, which is a development of the Super EV Concept that was demonstrated at the Goodwood Festival of Speed this summer.

The Super-N prototype is built on one of Honda's N-Series kei car platforms and bears close relation to the Japanese market N-One E – although the Super-N features a wider stance, beefed-up bumpers and aero ducts and a small lip spoiler.

While Honda has yet to reveal any of the Super-N's technical details, it should be one of the smallest electric city cars offered in the UK. To comply with kei car rules, the related N-One E is just under 3400mm long – some 200mm shorter than the Fiat 500e.

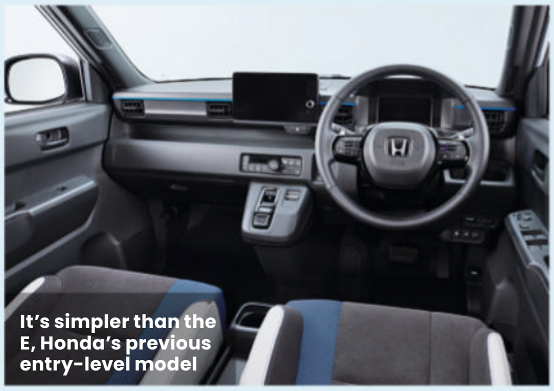
Honda hasn't said whether the Super-N will use the 63bhp electric motor featured in the N-One E but has confirmed the new model will feature a Boost mode. When activated, this will offer maximum power and artificial sound while simulating a multi-gear shift. Honda claims it will thereby offer "enhanced driving engagement that is unique to a vehicle of this size".

The production version of the Super-N will go on sale next year in Japan and a "select" number of global markets, including the UK – which initially will be the car's only European presence.

Pricing details have yet to be confirmed.

In the UK, the Super-N will effectively replace the short-lived Honda E as the entry point of the firm's range, albeit most likely at a much lower price than the E's £37k.

The Super-N is one of a number of EVs that Honda has displayed at the Tokyo motor show. Others include the 0 SUV; a new entry-level 0 Series model focused on Japan and India; and the RSX SUV prototype for Acura, its US-focused performance brand.


It's simpler than the E, Honda's previous entry-level model

have yet to be revealed, but Toyota said the Land Cruiser FJ has a similar ground clearance and approach angle to the Land Cruiser – 215.3mm and 31deg respectively – while offering a claimed turning circle of just 11m.

Toyota is targeting the "global south" with its new off-roader, having no plans to sell it in Europe.

The Land Cruiser FJ uses a pure-petrol engine (a 2.7-litre four-cylinder unit that makes 161bhp and 181lb ft of torque), whereas all of the company's UK offerings are electrified – even the full-size Land Cruiser, whose 2.8-litre diesel four has been mildly hybridised.

TOYOTA CREATES BRAND TO RIVAL BENTLEY

Toyota is transforming its Century sub-brand into a stand-alone luxury brand to sit above Lexus as a Bentley rival.

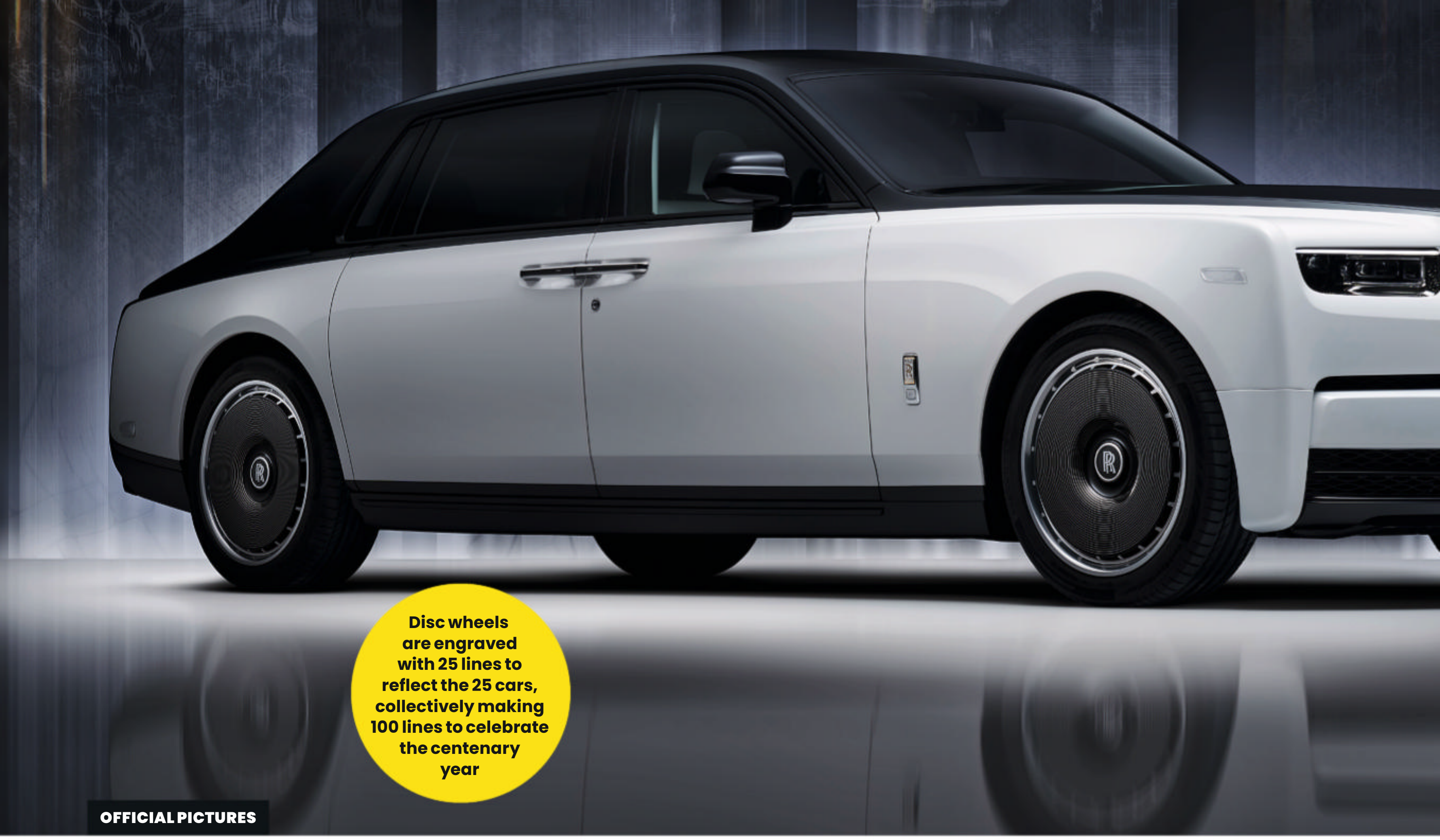
Century has been the name of Toyota's flagship saloon since 1967. A Bentley Bentayga-sized Century SUV was introduced in 2023, and now a radical SUV-coupé concept has been revealed at the Tokyo motor show as a statement of the newly spun off brand's intention to become "top of the top, one of one".

No global launch plans have been disclosed, but nevertheless the move has significance for the UK, because Toyota said it will allow Lexus to "move more freely".

Bold SUV-coupé will expand Century's range to three

NEW £2.5M ROLLS PHANTOM MARKS 100 YEARS IN STYLE

Special edition highlights key centenary moments with high-end details



Disc wheels are engraved with 25 lines to reflect the 25 cars, collectively making 100 lines to celebrate the centenary year

OFFICIAL PICTURES

Rolls-Royce has unveiled a special-edition Phantom described as the "most technically extraordinary car ever built" by the Goodwood maker, to mark the model's centenary.

Limited to 25 examples, the £2.5 million Phantom Centenary Private Collection has been created to showcase defining moments from the model's past 100 years.

While it retains the same technical specifications as a standard eighth-generation Phantom, including a twin-turbo 6.75-litre V12, the limited model is distinguished by its appearance both inside and out.

The exterior design has "a strong reference to [Rolls-Royce's] past", according to its designer, Matt Denton, using two-tone paint inspired by the 1930 Phantom II Continental. There is a new gold-flake crystal overpaint applied on top of both the white and black to create a metallic shimmer, a unique Spirit of Ecstasy and bespoke disc wheels. The 'RR' Badge of Honour, on the front, rear and sides of the car, is in 24-carat gold and white enamel for the first time.

The most notable changes appear inside, where innovations new to Rolls include the use of 3D marquetry, a decorative art form; 3D ink layering; and 24-carat gold leafing.

The rear seats portray three different stories through the ages, including an image of Rolls' Conduit Street showroom, where the first Phantom was launched, and Henry Royce's oil paintings of southern France. The process, which was "inspired by Savile Row tailoring techniques", uses 45 individual panels carefully aligned to the shape of the seats.

Meanwhile, the front seats use laser-etched artwork based on hand drawings and include a rabbit design – a nod to Roger Rabbit, the codename for Rolls-Royce's relaunch in 2003. More historical references are laced into the headliner, which uses 440,000 stitches.

On the dashboard is a so-called 'Anthology Gallery' that has 50 3D-printed vertical aluminium fins. Each of them is made up of sculpted letters readable from both sides, which form quotes from media acclaim over the century.

The standout detail is the intricate woodwork on the door cards, which shows noteworthy journeys made by Phantoms. For example, the front passenger door shows the landscape of Henry Royce's summer home in West Wittering while the driver's door depicts a fabled 4500-mile journey across Australia of the first BMW-era Phantom. Each of these creations include 3D marquetry, laser etching and 3D ink layering. They also use 24-carat gold-leafing.

CEO Chris Brownridge said: "Phantom has always been a car that people remember. It is the world's pinnacle luxury product. It has had a remarkable role over the years with owners including Queen Elizabeth II, 50 Cent and Salvador Dalí."

Sales and brand director Julian Jenkins added: "Phantom is integral to the brand. The world is changing but there has been consistently strong demands for Phantom in particular. The 25 units are already sold globally, many of them to very young clients, which demonstrates the enduring appeal this car has."

RACHEL BURGESS

Its paintwork was inspired by 1930 Phantom II Continental

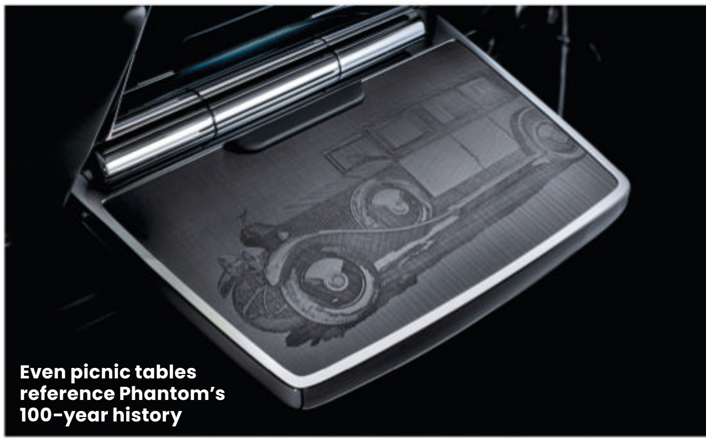
Rear seat trim depicts stories from the model's past

Gold-flake crystal overpaint creates a metallic shimmer

Unique example of the Spirit of Ecstasy, based on a 1925 casting, is solid 18-carat gold and plated in 24-carat gold "for robustness"

One door card maps 4500-mile Australia drive of BMW-era car

'Anthology Gallery' fins contain quotes from press reports



Even picnic tables reference Phantom's 100-year history

Q&A CHRIS BROWNRIDGE, CEO, ROLLS-ROYCE

How important are collections like this one?
"There's a very clear trend globally for ultra-high-net-worth individuals seeking luxury experiences. It's not just having objects. It's the experience of creating that luxury and so Rolls-Royce, I would argue, is the ultimate luxury experiential brand, because our product is not just the beautiful motor car that you've seen made today: it's actually the experience of creating it and working with our teams to create it.

"Of course, clients work with us to create their motor cars, but from time to time we like to come up with a creative idea that we call a Private Collection. They showcase the possibilities and innovate different techniques to really stimulate the imagination of our clients and potential clients."

Rolls-Royce has said previously it would be all-electric by 2030. What's the strategy now?
"The Spectre, launched in 2023, has been a huge success for us. In Europe, that was the most in-demand model last year. Anyone that's driven it tells us it's a perfect Rolls-Royce. We've proved that when electric is the only way for motor cars, we can still build the best car in the world, so I sleep well at night. We're a client-led organisation. We look at what's happening in the market and we'll make sure that we respond appropriately. We will always produce the motor cars our clients want, because if it's not ordered, we don't build it."

Do you stand by your previous comment that Rolls-Royce will only offer a V12 or electric?
"Yes, that's correct, because we wouldn't compromise on the experience. If you drive a Cullinan V12 or you drive a Spectre [EV], they're perfect Rolls-Royces. I think anything other than that would be a compromise."

Rolls-Royce currently makes around 6000 cars a year. What is your limit?
"We will only produce cars in response to demand, and our goal is to create value for our clients. It's a very successful business model. If demand increases, we'll respond to that, but we will always make sure it's scarce, because the moment it's not scarce, it's not a real luxury."

Where do you see the brand in five years?
"We have made a very clear statement with our investment here in Goodwood about the direction of this business, which is very much about rarity and creating remarkable motor cars. Our investment is to create the capacity for more bespoke cars, because the demand is really growing among our target audience. In five years' time, the brand will be even stronger than it is today. There will always be luxury trends, ups and downs in different parts of the world, but we have clients all over the world and I see a continued and strong growth in demand for more meaningful creations for our clients, and also more engagement with our clients."

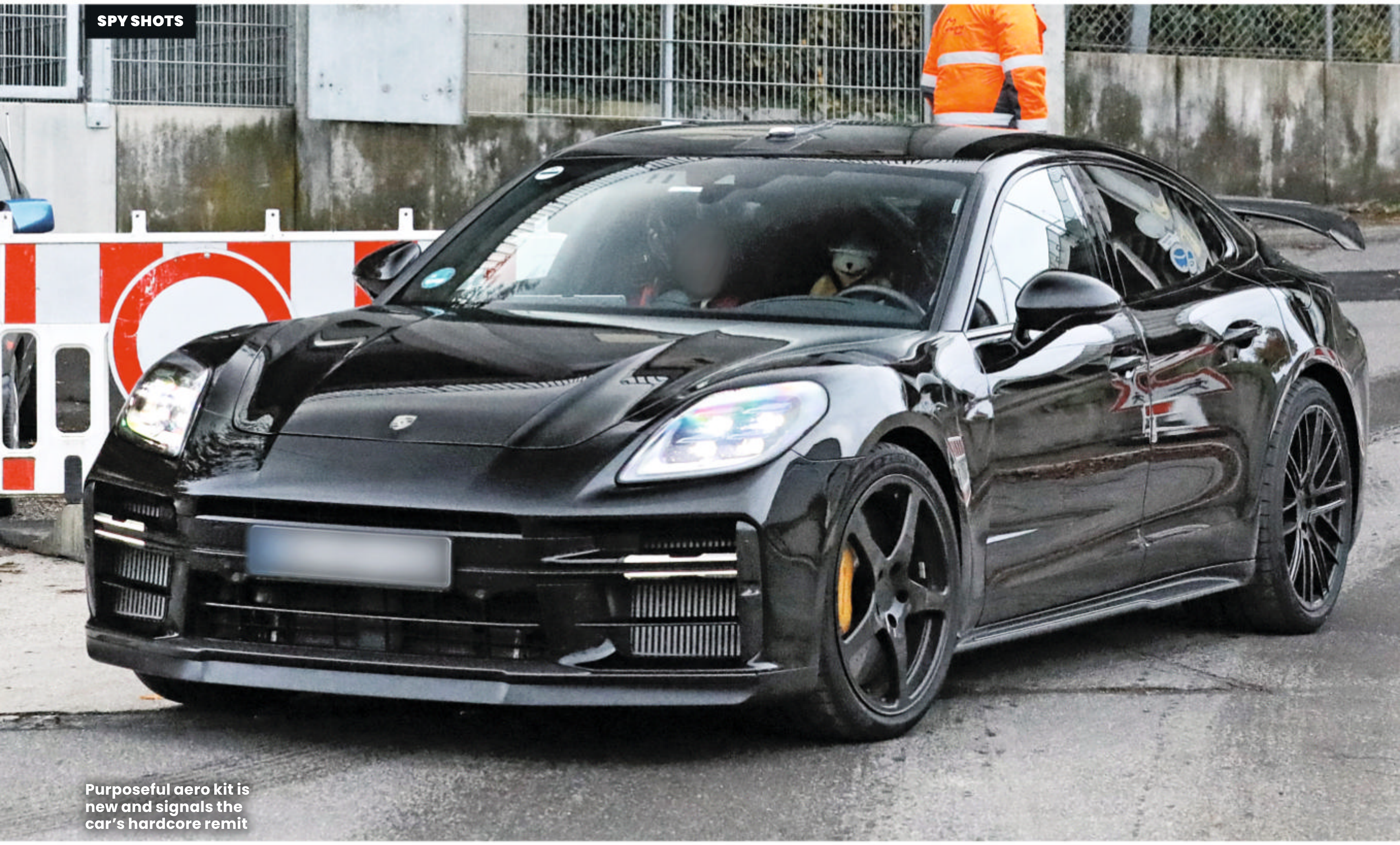
Anything coming up you can tell us about?
"There are some very exciting projects which we are not ready to talk about yet but we will be soon, later this year, maybe next year, which open up new possibilities for us."

PORSCHE PRIMES NEW EXTREME PANAMERA

Track-honed model has V8, roll-cage, variable suspension

Porsche is working on a more extreme, track-focused derivative of the Panamera saloon.

The most hardcore version to date has been the 760bhp Turbo S E-Hybrid, which still closely resembles the standard 348bhp Panamera despite the high


SPY SHOTS

Purposeful aero kit is new and signals the car's hardcore remit

Leiters has been McLaren Automotive CEO and Ferrari CTO

EX-McLAREN BOSS LEITERS TO REPLACE BLUME AT PORSCHE

FORMER McLAREN CEO Michael Leiters has been named the new boss of Porsche. He will replace Oliver Blume, who remains in his other role as head of the Volkswagen Group.

Leiters, who will begin on 1 January, left McLaren earlier this year after a three-year tenure as CEO, following the British company's merger with EV start-up Forseven.

Porsche chairman Wolfgang Porsche said Leiters' "leadership style and in-depth expertise are ideal prerequisites for successfully chairing" the brand.

Blume will step back from heading Porsche to focus on leading the Volkswagen Group, which he will do until at least 2030 after signing a new contract, the company confirmed.

The move follows mounting pressure over the 57-year-old German's dual leadership position. His split responsibilities between the Volkswagen Group and Porsche for the past three years have drawn

NEW JAGUAR OPENS UP

The long wait for Jaguar's game-changing electric GT continues – but new details keep trickling out as prototypes pile on the miles. This shot of a mule reveals a tiny, fastback-style bootlid and a high load lip.

SPY SHOT

RISE IN MOT COSTS MOOTED

The cost of your MOT could be about to rise. The government is reviewing the £54.85 limit that's been in place since 2010, which the garage industry says is unsustainable in light of the costs of running a workshop.

output of its V8-centred PHEV powertrain.

But new prototypes spotted by Autocar spy photographers reveal that something more serious is in the works – and it could potentially take the Turbo GT badge.

Spied at the Nürburgring, this test mule has been fitted with a number of high-performance bodywork modifications, including new vents in the front wings, a small Gurney flap, a fixed spoiler, a reworked diffuser and circular tailpipes.

It also has a pair of stickers referencing the Nordschleife and another German circuit, Bilster Berg, hinting at its track focus.

Autocar's photographers say the car sounds as if it retains a V8, but it has yet to be determined whether the powertrain is boosted by an electric motor.

However, the test mule was spotted running with two different suspension heights, which suggests it could be based on the E-Hybrid powertrain because the Panamera's Active Ride Control system is exclusive to PHEV models.

Given its performance billing, the new model is likely to receive a significant bump in power over the Turbo S E-Hybrid. This could be achieved through tweaks to both the car's petrol engine and motors.

The most powerful Porsche currently on sale is the 1020bhp Taycan Turbo GT electric saloon.

Photos show the new Panamera has been fitted with an RS-style roll-cage behind the front seats. It's possible the cage could be offered as part of a track-focused Weissach option package, as with the 911 GT3 and Taycan Turbo GT.

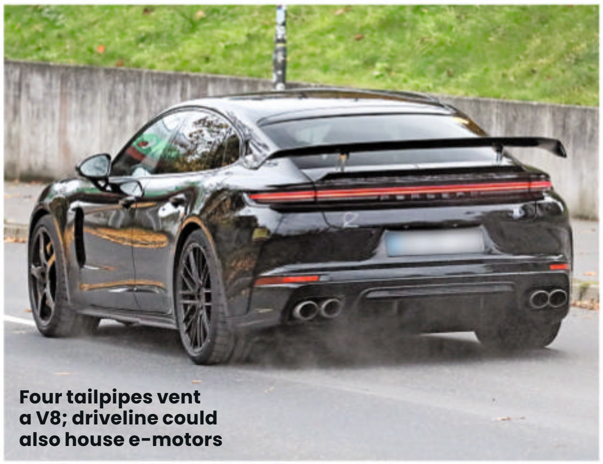
The development of new derivatives will be key to maintaining the Panamera's appeal after its life cycle was extended following a recent overhaul of Porsche's business plan.

The company has mothballed the SSP Sport platform that was due to underpin the electric, third-generation Panamera. It will instead revamp the ICE and hybrid versions to keep them running "well into the 2030s", said outgoing CEO Oliver Blume last month.

Meanwhile, "top" versions of the 718 Boxster and Cayman – assumed to mean the GT4 and RS derivatives – will remain on sale for the foreseeable future, having previously been planned to end production this year.

Porsche declined to comment.

CHARLIE MARTIN



Four tailpipes vent a V8; driveline could also house e-motors

Prototypes have been seen running two ride heights

OFFICIAL PICTURES

Macan GTS Electric is priced from £89k; range is 363 miles

MACAN ELECTRIC BOOSTS DRIVER APPEAL WITH GTS

Porsche has launched the Macan GTS Electric, a new driver-focused variant of its latest SUV.

Positioned between the 4S and Turbo, the GTS Electric is priced from £89,000. Its dual-motor powertrain delivers 509bhp but boosts to 563bhp and 704lb ft with launch control (129bhp and 299lb ft more than the petrol Macan) to achieve 0-62mph in 3.8sec.

To enhance driver engagement, it features an electronic rear differential, a 48:52 rear-biased weight distribution, bespoke dampers and a 10mm-lower ride height to improve its centre of gravity.

The GTS Electric uses the same 100kWh battery as other models and offers up to 363 miles of range. Distinctive black detailing, wider side skirts and new front and rear aprons set the model apart visually.

Dual-motor 563bhp GTS gets a rear e-diff and lower suspension

increasing scrutiny from investors and unions.

The leadership transition comes as both car manufacturers face significant restructuring and Porsche's global sales continue to falter.

Wolfgang Porsche said the board has "confidence" in Leiters "overcoming the current challenges".

While at McLaren, Leiters launched the Artura, replaced the 720S with the 750S and developed the W1 hypercar. Previously, he was Ferrari's chief technical officer and involved with the Purosangue SUV. During an earlier stint at Porsche, he oversaw development of the Cayenne.

Blume is leaving Porsche role to focus on VW Group

LEITERS: THE RIGHT PERSON AT THE RIGHT TIME FOR PORSCHE

MARK TISSHAW

Oliver Blume's problem was not a failure to identify the causes of Porsche's financial and product slump, but having the capacity to do something about it. It's hard enough to imagine how enormous the job of leading the Volkswagen Group is, let alone also performing the same role for a car maker with Porsche's scale.

The recruitment of Michael Leiters as CEO is a positive development for Porsche. Those who worked closely with him at McLaren credit him with keeping the company in business, such was his impact at Woking and the perilous state it got itself into. He didn't cause McLaren's woes but he went about fixing them. History will be kind to him.

From speaking to him in his previous stint at Porsche, at Ferrari and at McLaren, Leiters always gave the impression that good enough wasn't good enough. What good is it making performance cars that are good to drive if there's no business to support them, or quality standards in place to ensure their reliability and build quality? His all-round skills and leadership are just what Porsche needs right now.

UK TECH FIRM DOES IT AGAIN

Yasa has broken its own record for EV motor power density, achieving 79bhp/kg with a new 12.7kg axial-flux unit, making for more than 1000bhp. It could appear in a high-performance EV once it's validated.

POTHOLES ON THE INCREASE

Think roads are getting worse? You're not imagining it. The RAC says it attended just over 5000 pothole-related breakdowns from July to September. That's 25% more than in the same period last year.

ICE Leon overhauled for 2029 launch; EV to join it next decade

UPDATED ICE LEON CRUCIAL TO SEAT'S NEW-LOOK FUTURE

Seat to revise ICE models before any EV shift as VW Group's entry brand

Seat will launch a heavily updated Leon in 2029 as it doubles down on its existing combustion line-up and rides out the uncertainty surrounding the industry's transition to electric cars.

The updated Leon will follow the launch of refreshed versions of the Ibiza and Arona next year, new mild-hybrid engines for those models in 2027 and a full-hybrid powertrain for the Leon in 2028.

Details of the 2029 Leon remain under wraps, but it is likely to be tied to updates to its Volkswagen Golf platform-mate. The Golf is understood to be in line for a heavy update at around the same time to keep it on sale alongside an exclusively electric new-generation Golf, which is due before the turn of the decade.

The Cupra-badged Leon will go electric for its next generation at the start of the 2030s and be based on the same SSP platform as the Golf. Seat/Cupra is most likely to mirror that strategy with the Seat-badged ICE Leon.

A hint at future plans was provided to Autocar by product chief Carlos Galindo last week. He indicated that, more generally, the priority for Seat will be to make the brand feel "younger" and more exciting.

Seat will be repositioned as the "entrance" to the Volkswagen Group, a role historically occupied by Skoda, but with a range of models and marketing aimed at a different audience from the more mature Skoda buyer.

"We still have a lot of young customers that want to get a first car and get into the brand and Seat is representing these young customers better than any other [brand]," Galindo told Autocar.

While Seat persists with its existing combustion line-up, EVs are still expected to be part of its future – but not until the turn of the decade, former CEO Wayne Griffiths previously told Autocar. "It is not the time for a Seat EV just yet," he said.

Galindo confirmed to Autocar that this is still the plan under new CEO Markus Haupt but said hybridisation is the correct path for the firm for the time being.

"Taking into consideration how we see the automotive industry currently, this is the right path to do with Seat – to see how electrification finally evolves," he said. "We think the investments we are doing today in electrifying [hybridising] the brand are on the right path. This will help us to bridge between the current moment of internal combustion engines and to electrification.

"We'll see in the future how these evolve and continue to grow, to decide where to go exactly."

As for the newly announced blitz of updates, Galindo said the decision to launch an updated Ibiza and Arona before their mild-hybrid powertrains are ready is because the brand is awaiting the publication of finalised Euro 7 emissions regulations.

"We thought now would be a good moment to make the changes to Arona and Ibiza to be ready to fight the competition," he said.

CHARLIE MARTIN

Ibiza and Arona have been refreshed for 2026

Product boss Galindo wants Seat brand to feel "younger"

■ **NEW IBIZA DRIVEN, P32**

CHIP SHORTAGE HALTS GOLF PRODUCTION

VOLKSWAGEN IS SET to suspend Golf production at its Wolfsburg plant from today (29 October) due to a renewed microchip crisis triggered by the US-China trade dispute.

The pause in output of one of Europe's best-selling cars might extend to other models, including the Tiguan, Touran and Tayron.

The new chip shortage stems from a supply freeze by Nexperia after the Dutch government – under pressure from the US – seized the Chinese-owned company, prompting Beijing to ban chip exports. With no alternative suppliers ready, Volkswagen faces possible wider stoppages and is in talks with the German government over schemes to avoid mass layoffs.

US-China trade row is affecting Nexperia chip supply to VWs

RANGE-BUSTING CHERY TIGGO 9 PHEV HITS THE UK

OFFICIAL PICTURES

Tiggo 9 has a 91-mile EV range, 422bhp and a price of £43,105

CHERY HAS ADDED a new seven-seat plug-in hybrid SUV to its UK range. Called the Tiggo 9, it touts performance and range figures that eclipse those of most rivals while beating nearly all of them on price.

Chery launched in the UK earlier this year with two mid-sized SUVs – the Tiggo 7 and Tiggo 8 – after sibling brands Omoda and Jaecoo had rapidly built up a sizeable market share in their first year here.

Priced from £43,105, the 4.8m-long Tiggo 9 undercuts PHEV versions of the similarly sized Volkswagen Tayron and Kia Sorento to become one of the UK's cheapest seven-seat plug-in hybrids – although the slightly smaller Tiggo 8 is cheaper still.

The Tiggo 9 uses an evolution of Chery's 'Super Hybrid' PHEV drivetrain, which combines a 1.5-litre turbo petrol engine with two electric motors and a starter-generator to produce a combined 422bhp and 428lb ft. That's sufficient to give a 0-62mph time of 5.4sec – significantly quicker than its closest rivals.

The Tiggo 9 also has a far longer claimed EV range. Its 34.5kWh battery is good for 91 miles of engine-off running on the WLTP cycle, eclipsing the Volkswagen Golf eHybrid to offer the longest EV range of any PHEV on sale.

With a peak speed of 71kW, it can also charge almost as fast as some pure-EV alternatives.

Deliveries begin in December and Chery will sell the Tiggo 9 in just one, highly specified trim level. The Jeep Avenger-sized Tiggo 4 crossover will be launched shortly after with a pure-petrol powertrain.

Seven-seat PHEV will be sold in a single, high-spec trim level

BYD SHRINKS THE PHEV WITH ATTO 2

BYD is preparing to launch the UK's smallest PHEV by installing a plug-in hybrid drivetrain in the Atto 2 crossover. Due early next year, it will be the brand's third PHEV and offer two power outputs and an EV range of 56 miles. At just 4.3m long, it will be shorter than any PHEV on sale apart from the Jeep Renegade, which will soon be retired.

BYD
ATTO 2 DM-i

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE

Mixed waste material is recycled into foam for steering wheels

PORSCHE IS STEERING ITS WAY TO BETTER RECYCLING

PORSCHE HAS CREATED some of the most thrilling performance cars of all time but, behind the scenes, it's also using its engineering expertise to perfect better methods of recycling.

Working with German chemical giant BASF SE and technology partner BEST (Bioenergy and Sustainable Technologies), Porsche has recently completed a joint project for recycling troublesome mixed waste from end-of-life vehicles into a form that can be used to make new high-grade components.

One of the difficulties in automotive recycling is dealing with fragmented leftover waste material once all the metals are removed. After dismantling into individual parts, some of which can be recycled relatively easily, what remains is shredded to produce automotive shredder residue (ASR). This can include textiles, glass, foam, plastics, dust and dirt, films and paint particles. So far, ASR is often disposed of by recovering energy as heat by incineration, but the ideal is to be able to recycle it into something usable.

Because of the complex mix of materials, ASR can't simply be melted down like steel or aluminium for reuse. But it can go through a procedure that turns it into gas as a first step on the road to producing high-grade plastic. This process is aptly named 'gasification'. It was discovered several hundred years ago and has been developed and used over the years for creating town gas, synthetic fuels and chemicals and transportation fuels from coal.

In this case, it works by heating the materials to typically beyond 700deg C and with little oxygen present to produce 'syngas'. Syngas can be used to generate heat or as a stepping stone to producing synthetic liquid fuel but, here, BASF uses it to make polyurethane, which is sent to a specialist supplier to make polyurethane foam.

Porsche says the raw material produced from gasification is of comparable quality to conventional primary raw materials and, in this pilot project, it's using the foam to make new steering wheels. The aim is to use the gasification process in this way on a larger scale as an alternative to the existing thermal energy recovery method.

This form of recycling has an added benefit: plastic waste that can't be recycled for technical, economic or ecological reasons can be used to make high-quality components.

Secondary raw materials produced from recycling are often mixed with fossil-based primary raw materials and that poses a question: is recycling really making a difference and, if so, how much? The answer comes from using the 'mass balance' method – essentially an accounting system where a third party tracks each step in the supply chain from sourcing to processing and manufacturing and certifies the proportion of sustainable materials used in the final product.

NEW FORD OF EUROPE BOSS FACES A GRUELLING REBUILD

Sales have halved since 2015 – and now the Chinese are eating its lunch

Ford is not the force it once was in Europe. In the past 10 years, the American giant has gone from being the second-biggest car brand in Europe (after Volkswagen), with sales of just over one million, all the way down to 12th last year after sales halved. Its market share dropped from 7.0% to 3.7%, according to European automotive industry group ACEA.

Arresting the slide is the immediate task of newly appointed Ford of Europe president Jim Baumbick. An American development engineer who did a stint overseeing the Focus and Kuga in Germany, Baumbick is the first to hold that title since Briton Stuart Rowley departed in 2022, signifying a renewed focus on Ford's European product strategy.

In Ford's largest European market, the UK, the change in the Blue Oval's fortunes has been stark. In 40 years the brand has gone from leading the market with a 26.5% share to fourth with a 5.8% share in the first nine months of this year, according to the SMMT.

The drop has hit the brand's dealers hardest. Back when the Peoples Ford dealer group was established in 1983, Ford took four slots in the UK top 10, led by the best-selling Escort. The brand can still boast the UK's best-selling car with the Puma, but one hit model is not enough to generate the sales needed.

Last year, Peoples ended more than 40 years of brand exclusivity with Ford to strike partnerships with Chinese newcomers BYD and Chery-owned Omoda and Jaecoo.

"Ford's decision to stop Fiesta production and go all in on electric vehicles has proved to be challenging," said chairman Brian Gilda.

Other dealers are having to do the same as Ford works to achieve its goal for this year of halving its retail network in the UK from 400 sites in 2020.

Gilda's decision has proven wise. The combined UK market share of BYD, Omoda and Jaecoo in September beat that of Ford, underlining the seriousness of the threat presented by the Chinese to established volume players.

MARKET TROUBLES

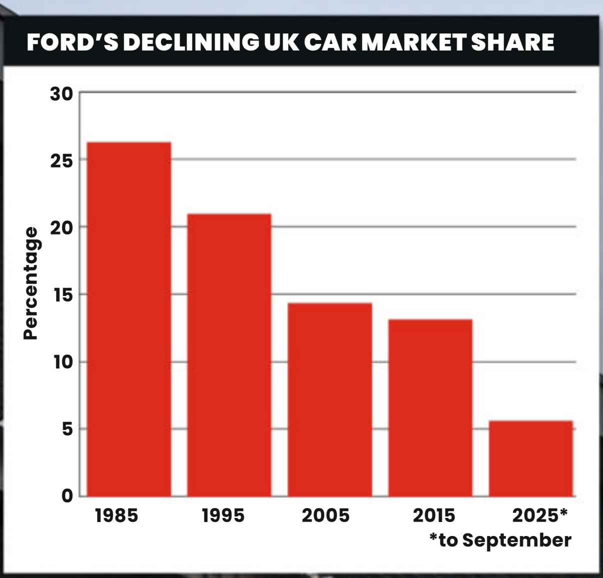
Over the years, Ford has shrunk its model range. In the coming weeks it will end production of the Focus, which becomes the latest to depart the line-up after the Fiesta, S-Max and Galaxy in 2023, the Mondeo in 2021 and the Ka+ in 2019.

Whereas American rival General Motors waved the white flag and exited Europe in 2017 (although it is now relaunching here), Ford's aim has been to reverse a chronic run of unprofitability in the region by moving from being a 'generalist' brand selling multiple cars at tight or negative margins to one with fewer but theoretically more profitable 'hero cars'.

Now its car sales are mainly resting on the success of the Puma, the UK's best-selling model in the nine months to the end of September, at 41,531, according to the SMMT. Its next best-seller, the Kuga, sold less than half that, at 18,827, with the moribund Focus in third.

It's a much rosier picture on the commercial vehicle side, with Ford taking the top three spots in the first nine months in the UK, led

Baumbick is tasked with reviving Ford's fortunes



FIESTA · II
K FK 780 H

Fiesta was one of Europe's favourite cars for five decades

“The brand remains strong, but is it strong enough?”

by the Transit Custom with 38,185 sales, followed by the larger Transit and Ranger pick-up truck.

Ford's successful Transit strategy has been underpinned by low-cost manufacturing in Turkey, a fruitful partnership with industrial conglomerate Koc in the country and an iron grip on a market that so far has had little in the way of disruption from Japan, Korea or China.

Ford's commercial vehicle success is in contrast to its car strategy. Sales of the Volkswagen-based Explorer and Capri electric SUVs (two of the new ‘hero cars') have been sluggish to the point that Ford announced it would cut 1000 jobs at the Cologne factory that builds them once it moves workers to a single shift in January.

JOBS TO DO

Baumbick's first job is to oversee the launch of a new model due to come out of Ford's Valencia plant in Spain in 2027. So far all Ford will say is that it's a “multi-energy vehicle”, but Autocar understands that it will be an SUV slightly smaller than the Kuga, essentially replacing the Focus and rivalling Volkswagen's hugely successful T-Roc. It is expected to offer hybrid, plug-in hybrid and possibly electric powertrains.

Recent promises from within the European Commission to reduce some of the burdens on makers of small cars in the EU could also persuade Ford to explore the prospect of a Fiesta replacement, perhaps also using Volkswagen components.

The Kuga – currently the only model built at Ford's Valencia factory – will also be under review as it approaches its sixth year in service.

The plug-in hybrid version has been essential to Ford's CO_2 emissions strategy for a while now, but with a 14.4kWh battery giving an electric-only range of 41 miles, it will no longer be competitive under new EU rules that increases the assumed combustion driving time, thereby raising the car's official CO_2 figure and cancelling some tax benefits.

The Kuga is also under threat from the Chinese brands embraced by Peoples and other dealers. They offer cheaper plug-in hybrid SUVs such as the Jaecoo 7 and BYD Seal U, both of which have this year overtaken the Kuga – once the UK's biggest-selling PHEV.

The new Ford SUV out of Valencia has the incredibly difficult task of challenging the Chinese on price while differentiating itself from Ford's already quite broad range of SUVs.

The brand remains strong, but the question is whether it's strong enough in the UK to keep hold of buyers who have proved more than willing to experiment with new brands in return for more kit and cost savings.

NICK GIBBS

Explorer EV hasn't been the big seller Ford needs it to be

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

AUTOCAR
IMAGE

We've been getting mixed messages about a new 2CV

IN DECEMBER LAST year, then Renault Group CEO Luca de Meo made it clear that he was happy to take questions on anything over dinner – so long as they didn't concern the top job at Stellantis, vacated 24 hours earlier by Carlos Tavares.

I found a way to ask him anyway, and he certainly had prepared an answer. He took it well – much better than what I thought was a more innocuous question about whether retro design was a strategy Renault would be continuing with.

De Meo firmly rejected my suggestion that the new 4, 5 and Twingo were retro, insisting they were instead what those cars would have looked like had they stayed in continuous production. If they were retro, he said, then “the Golf is a retro design, the S-Class is a retro design… We've just taken some of the classic designs and spirit and moved them into the 21st century.”

I got his point, but I still think he's wrong. The very definition of ‘retro' is to be ‘imitative of the past', and what are the 4, 5 and Twingo if not that? And what's the problem if they are?

Indeed, François Leboine, the man who designed the 5 and has since moved to Fiat, where he has created the Grande Panda, doesn't shy away from either of the pair being labelled retro. A spade is a spade, after all.

Troubled car makers have often looked to the past to revive or reinvent themselves – with mixed results. Not everything can be a BMW Mini or a Fiat 500 (another de Meo creation): just ask VW how the New Beetle did or try to keep a straight face as Ford claims the current Capri is just like how the old one would have ended up by now anyway.

Audi's future starts with bringing back the original TT (see p46), while BMW's Neue Klasse EV range, although decidedly more modern in its styling, harks back to its 1960s glory days in the execution and ethos of the project. What's old is new.

Citroën is another brand looking for a shot in the arm as it wrestles with its future identity, as recently outlined by new CEO Xavier Chardon (Grapevine, 8 October). For the past year, a saga has been playing out starring one of its own icons, the 2CV.

Former CEO Thierry Koskas said Citroën was looking to leverage the 2CV in its future and chief designer Pierre Leclercq, who is supportive of retro design for the right use case, said his team had created a modern 2CV but was unsure about its future.

Chardon, whose decision it will ultimately be, speaks of the 2CV more in terms of providing the DNA and spirit of the original than a retro revival. We understand that Citroën's forward-looking brand event in December won't involve a new 2CV.

2CV or not 2CV? It's a question that Citroën execs continue to debate. I believe they should go for it. Rather that than another SUV or hatch fighting the crowd on secondary qualities. There's only one 2CV, after all.

“What are these cars if not imitative of the past? And what's the issue if they are?”

TOSCANA
AR 024SO
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PETROL GIULIA, STELVIO LIVE ON

Alfa is also bringing back hot Quadrifoglios – as it delays EV successors

SPY SHOT

Second-generation Stelvio now won't arrive until 2027

Alfa Romeo will keep selling the current-generation Giulia and Stelvio through to 2027 – including the 513bhp Quadrifoglio range-toppers – as it rethinks its plan to replace them with pure-electric successors.

Based on the then new Giorgio platform, the saloon and SUV siblings were introduced in 2015 and have been only lightly updated since then. This makes them among the market's oldest cars, raising questions about their ongoing viability, particularly given the need for Alfa to comply with strict new European emissions and safety regulations.

But UK boss Jules Tilstone confirmed to Autocar that the pure-petrol Giulia and Stelvio can continue, alongside the electrified Junior crossover and updated Tonale SUV.

"Eighty per cent of the [UK] market is still ICE," he said. "People are looking for fun-to-drive performance ICE cars, and the Giulia and Stelvio offer that in spades."

Tilstone also confirmed that the pair will continue to be offered with a 270bhp four-cylinder petrol engine as standard and added: "We're also bringing back the Quadrifoglio versions of both the Giulia and Stelvio."

The V6 performance versions were taken out of production in September but will start running down the line again at Alfa's factory in Cassino, Italy, from April 2026.

It is unconfirmed whether either engine needed extensive modifications to comply with the incoming Euro 7 emissions rules, but Tilstone said "the powertrains will be effectively the same".

The news that the petrol Stelvio will continue for the foreseeable future comes as Alfa Romeo delays the second generation of the SUV until 2027.

The next Stelvio was originally due to arrive in 2026 as an EV-only rival to the Porsche Macan Electric and Alpine A390, but faltering demand for electric premium and sporting models has prompted a rethink. The car is understood to now be in line for a multi-powertrain offering, including some form of electrified combustion system.

The move will also affect the next Giulia, which will be closely related to the Stelvio, and was expected to follow closely behind.

More details are expected when Stellantis CEO Antonio Filosa unwraps his long-term strategy for the group in the first half of 2026.

FELIX PAGE

Giulia has had only minor updates since its UK arrival in 2015

Q&A JULES TILSTONE, UK MANAGING DIRECTOR, ALFA ROMEO

How is Alfa performing in the UK?
"We're in a good place, but obviously in quite a big transition period in terms of product. We're coming up to a year with the Junior, which has been a huge boost for the brand. Obviously, it's a bit of a test when it comes to BEVs, as the first full-BEV offer, but it's been really well received."

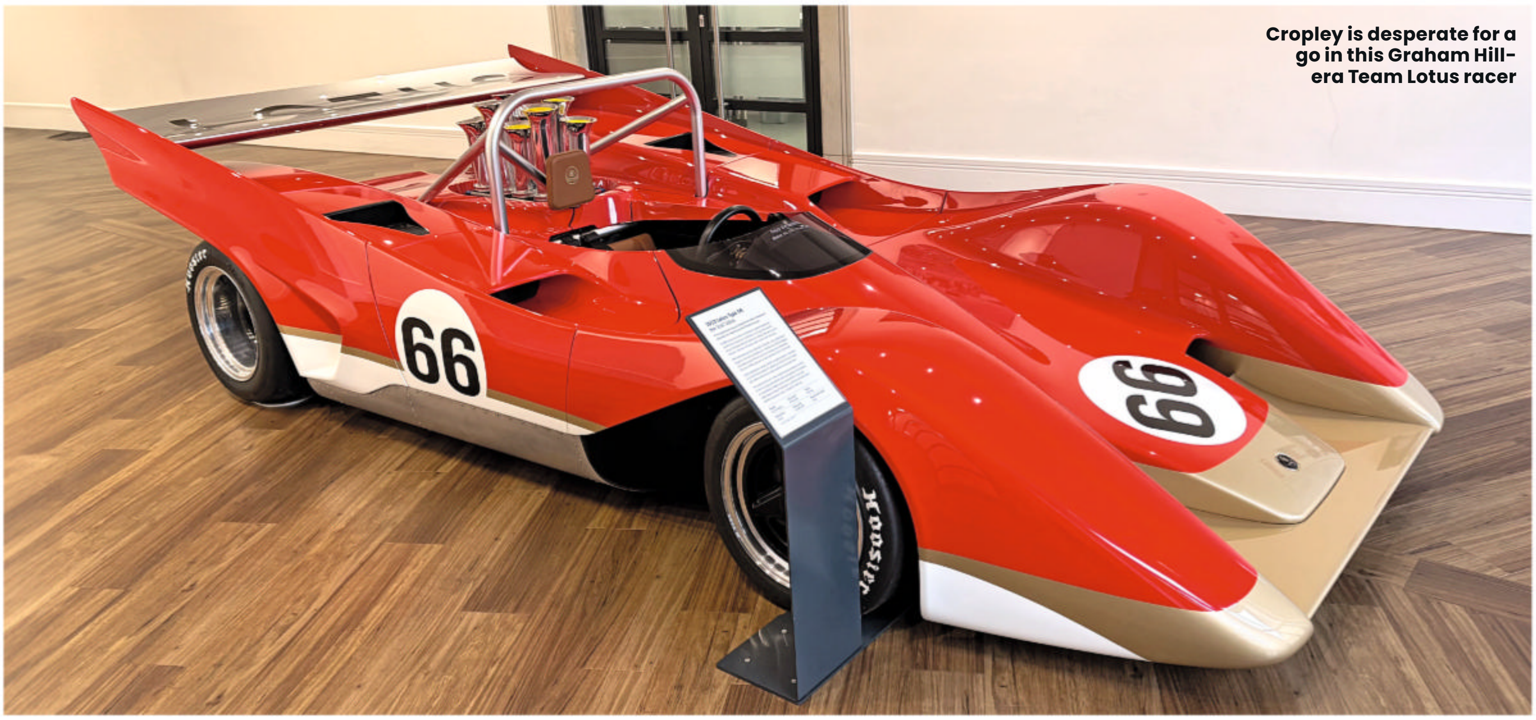
Will you limit Giulia and Stelvio sales to avoid negatively affecting your EV sales mix?
"I don't have a concern about the EV mix – I don't think we'll be curtailed. We're not here to deliver market share for Stellantis: we're here to grow as a brand. My priority is to ensure the profitability of the brand, and of the network in the UK – to organically grow and bring conquest customers to Alfa Romeo, but also to the group, because we don't have anything else like Alfa Romeo within Stellantis."

Audi has sold 45k Q3s in the time you've sold 3k Tonales. How do you attract dealer partners with those volumes?
"For every investor partner we have, we build a business model – and our channel mix is quite different to some of our competitors. So the volume might be there for other manufacturers, but how much are the retailers making on those cars? Depending on the channels they're supplying to, it makes a difference to the return on investment. We don't ask for a big gin palace for Alfa Romeo: it's about quality, not quantity. So it's quite a different business case to other more mainstream premium brands."

Alfa is not going for sales supremacy, but what are your volume ambitions?
"In the UK, there is no ceiling. You've got a bit of a glass ceiling on products like the Junior Veloce hot hatch, but the market opportunity is in the mid-powered range of products. What is the ceiling for a B-SUV like Junior, which puts a smile on everyone's face, whether you're in the petrol version or the full-electric version? So there is no ceiling to volume. What's important is that we are bringing new customers in. We're not here to be a niche brand."

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley



Cropley is desperate for a go in this Graham Hill-era Team Lotus racer

MONDAY

Apart from dalliances with V8s (and begging an exception for a currently owned Ford twin-turbo V6), I've always had a preference for small road cars with simple engines. So why I should be seized by a deep desire to try an 830bhp Chevy V8-powered 'lost' Lotus 66 Can-Am racer is difficult to fathom.

I came upon this mysterious machine while wandering the British Motor Museum at Gaydon with head of collections Stephen Laing and my colleague Matt Prior. We were recording a podcast for transmission on 5 November (as close as we can get to Autocar's 130th birthday on 2 November). This car is one of a dozen fascinating Lotus prototypes the museum is bringing to the light from storage at Hethel.

This 66, built just a few years ago using 1969 plans commissioned by Colin Chapman, was supposed to compete in the Canadian-American Challenge Cup (very lucrative for McLaren at the time) but never did. The plans were discovered later and the 66 was built on the original layout using current motorsport expertise.

The plan, says the museum's blurb, is that Lotus will build 10 track specials and charge owners £1 million each. Given Hethel's doubtful condition at present, it's anyone's guess whether that will happen. Still, I found that central, well-trimmed gentleman driver's seat enticing indeed. Oddly, an invitation to drive has yet to arrive…

> **"He spent much of his youth squeezed in the back of Corvettes"**

Ubiquity obscures how remarkable C1 really is

TUESDAY

It's so great (and rare) to hear candid stories from big industry bosses about how their sheer love of cars lured them into the business. In a riveting guest essay published by the US business organ Automotive News, General Motors president Mark Reuss talks about his lifelong love of cars, especially Corvettes. He describes spending a large part of his youth squeezed into the back of coupés driven by his dad (Lloyd Reuss, an earlier GM president) and about meeting the visionary 'Vette pioneer Zora Arkus-Duntov by chance at a swap meet.

He's also great on the "pinch-me moments" of creating the latest, eighth-generation Corvette, one of which he famously drove at 233.5mph. He relates the C8's mid-engined layout "inevitably" to three Arkus-Duntov-inspired mid-engined V8 CERV concepts made between 1962 and 1990. It's a fascinating dip into GM heritage, but the best thing of all is the joy in the writing.

WEDNESDAY

Here's an example to car buyers everywhere: Cumbria-based reader Darren Geldard has just paid £1450 for an 18,000-mile, 2008 Citroën C1, wheels for his 19-year-old daughter. It's a basic Vibe manual that costs £20 to tax, is cheap to insure and gives 65mpg. What a peach!

As Geldard says, the C1 could make a great entrant for the Festival of the Unexceptional in a few years' time, but what strikes me now is how modern it still looks after 18 years. I don't believe the designers of the C1/107/Aygo triplets received the praise they deserved.

THURSDAY

My habit of referring to my wife as The Steering Committee has attracted notice at times, and the reactions have been positive and negative. Someone mentioned the other day that his own term for his life's partner was Fighter Command. It sounded like a step too far…

FRIDAY

As we approach Autocar's 130th birthday, it seems entirely appropriate to send our best wishes to Colin Bates of Brockenhurst, who was in touch recently and has been with us nearly half that time, having started in October 1966. It's the proudest boast of our venerable – but fiercely up-to-date – mag that there are many more like Colin. To every supporter, young or old, we send greetings and heartfelt thanks.

AND ANOTHER THING

Very sorry to hear of the death of Pat Quinn, daughter of Jaguar founder Sir William Lyons, who with her first husband Ian Appleyard competed in more than 20 international rallies in the early 1950s. Together they had much success in the Monte Carlo, RAC and Tulip rallies and the Alpine Trial, building the reputation of what became and remains the world's greatest XK120, famously registered NUB 120.

GETTY IMAGES

GET IN TOUCH
steve.cropley@haymarket.com

PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

Spare a thought for the MPV, won't you? The multi-purpose vehicle, as it was known, was a big, boxy thing sometimes described back in its heyday as a people carrier. As opposed to what I never knew: what is a car if not a vehicle for carrying people?

Anyway, I use the word 'was' because while some still exist, most MPVs – like the Volkswagen Sharan, Ford Galaxy and a plethora of others – didn't survive the past decade's push towards posh; the move towards 'lifestyle'.

An MPV suggested, I think, and if you will excuse my paraphrasing a mood of the times, that while its owners had been somewhat successful in the sack, they had somewhat given up on other areas of life, such as style or luxury. They had become the frame, not the picture, as parenthood is sometimes described, to the detriment of their own existence. An MPV's owners were so busy with baby buggies, runs to school, evening child-related activities involving cramming loads of *stuff* into a vehicle that there wasn't any room for their own lives, personal leisure and pleasure: hiking, showing off, having a nice time in a nice-looking car and doing the lifestyley things that an SUV – a sport utility vehicle – was supposed to allow one to do.

The SUV – now more than half of all cars sold in the UK and still inexplicably rising – looks more rufty-tufty and classy and says more about its owner, whereas an MPV says more about its passengers.

So when society – via social media, reality telly and more – promoted self-obsession and 'me time' and perhaps even glorified a little narcissism, the SUV took off. When me-me-me became fashionable, the MPV did the inverse.

Cars like this had lots going for them but also an unexciting image

What a pity. And what rot. Because actually no car is more lifestyle-oriented, and arguably no car is more luxurious, than an MPV. Time is the biggest luxury of all, but space is maybe the next one after that. Big houses cost more than small ones. And no car offers space like what is effectively a small van. This is, after all, why the Americans call such vehicles minivans.

MPVs are incredibly airy. That's sometimes seen as undesirable and unfashionable. Boring. Why is it that in a luxurious house we want big windows and optimum airiness, perhaps floor to ceiling glass, and old buildings with big, high ceilings are lovely, yet in a car, a high window line and a snug, cocooning ambience is preferable? In a house, we would call it poky.

An MPV is the closest there is to an extension of the home – probably the most luxurious and relaxed space any of us has. It's the equivalent of a conservatory: nice big windows letting the sun stream through and warming our souls as we recline in semi-relaxed chairs, with the benefit that it can be kept the right temperature all the time and the view changes.

"When me-me-me became fashionable, MPVs did the inverse"

MPVs are also – or rather can be – quite nice to drive. Shorn of the obligation of pretending to be off-roaders or sporty in any way, they can be set up comfortably – something that is, mercifully, becoming slightly more popular than it has been in recent times but still, I think, an underrated virtue.

And when it comes to efficiency, while an MPV has a large frontal area, it's a relatively aerodynamic shape. The Volkswagen Type 2 had a cleaner drag coefficient than the Jaguar D-Type.

Today, while largely ignored in the mainstream sector, the MPV does survive, and here's the thing: it's a true luxury vehicle. It's used by those who are so busy that they don't drive themselves. The Lexus LM, for example, is just a four-seater and it starts at £95k. The Volkswagen California is perhaps more day van than camper van and starts at £65k. And there's perhaps no car more suited to an active lifestyle than a four-wheel-drive California.

What the mainstream market overlooks the true luxury market still remembers. If you want to look successful, be successful, forget your pseudo-off-roaders or sports cars or coupés: MPVs are where it's at. Perhaps the mass market will remember that at some point and not look down on it when it happens.

GET IN TOUCH
matthew.prior@haymarket.com

MPVs are back – but this time as chauffeur-driven limos-cum-mobile offices

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Toyota's Evans could become the first British WRC champion since 2001

Advantage Elfyn Evans: the Welshman is back at the head of the World Rally Championship with just two rounds to go, following a dramatic hard-surface Central European Rally in October.

Evans has a 13-point buffer over fellow Toyota aces Kalle Rovanperä and Sébastien Ogier and on the face of it has a golden chance to finally claim his first world title. But there are still a heap of stage miles to complete, on Rally Japan on 6-9 November and the Saudi Arabian finale at the end of the month, and you wouldn't bet against either Rovanperä or Ogier overturning that deficit. Twists and turns surely await.

RARE CLANGER

Now running full bore to claim a record-equalling ninth WRC crown, Ogier looked on course to stretch his recently established points lead on picturesque roads that crossed borders between Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic. Then a rare mistake after a loss of pressure in a front tyre: on a treacherous surface, he understeered into a ditch and smacked a tree. That handed the lead and victory to Rovanperä, although Ogier at least returned for the Super Sunday finale to win every stage and claim maximum points for the day. Still, what a time to drop his GR Yaris Rally1.

Predictably, Evans didn't get too carried away. At the finish, all three Toyota drivers focused on the Japanese brand claiming an inevitable fifth consecutive manufacturers' title, the GR Yaris having won 11 of the 12 rounds so far this year.

Still, Evans had reason to feel satisfied. He had briefly abandoned his cautious approach on the final Power Stage to snatch second from Hyundai's Ott Tänak, who nearly smashed into the end of a narrow bridge that had already claimed his team-mate Thierry Neuville.

> **"It's extreme, intriguing and more than a touch weird"**

When he has to, Evans has speed to unleash, yet has only two wins this term compared with Ogier's five and Rovanperä's three, and his last was back in March. Consistency has served him well, although at some point Evans will probably need to actually beat his team-mates in Japan and Saudi if he is to grab control of his destiny. At 36, this might be his final chance for a title.

SHOCK SWITCH

The WRC is still reeling from Rovanperä's bombshell: while still gunning for a third title, this will be his final year in rallying (at least for now) as he switches to Japan's Super Formula. Eh? As motorsport code breaking goes, it's extreme, certainly intriguing and more than a touch weird.

It also smacks of arrogance. Yes, Rovanperä is a phenomenal talent who at only 25 already has nothing left to prove in the WRC, but he has plucked just about the toughest single-seater championship to crack beyond diving straight into Formula 1, especially for someone without a background in Formula 4 and Formula 3.

Mayer: fired by Ben Sulayem, shut out of presidential race

The series is packed with local talents, most of whom have vast experience of a motorsport culture renowned for being unique and hard for Europeans to adapt to. Rovanperä is no fool: he has some insight into the Japanese scene from his drifting and will understand the scale of what he's taking on. But there's a risk that he wastes years of his prime struggling out of his depth in an arena that is tough even on drivers who have dedicated their childhoods to single-seaters.

I hope I'm wrong, that Rovanperä's wondrous natural ability and admirable sense of adventure will be enough to catapult him to the top – but I can't help worrying that he's biting off too much.

ONE-HORSE RACE

Ahead of the US Grand Prix, the politics of world motorsport were thrown into an uncomfortable spotlight once again. Tim Mayer, the fired FIA steward who planned to run against incumbent Mohammed Ben Sulayem in the 12 December presidential election, has pulled out of the race.

Why? Not because he feared losing but because it's not a race at all. The system is stacked against him and fellow prospective candidates Laura Villars and Virginie Philippot in a manner that prevents anyone challenging the incumbent.

In short, to stand, a candidate must have support from six prospective vice-presidents for sport, each drawn from six global regions. But the list includes only one from South America, who just happens to be Bernie Ecclestone's Brazilian wife Fabiana, and she is already supporting the current president. Thus Ben Sulayem can't be opposed: it's impossible. Mayer describes the FIA structure as "the illusion of democracy".

So, four more years for a divisive, egotist president who wields power in a manner that rubs up against what most of us consider democratic convention. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week

I GOT THE BLUE

Will Rimell's recent report on his long-term Volkswagen Golf GTE (8 October) spoke of some parallels I see with my own Volkswagen, a 2014 Polo BlueGT.

Lack of ultimate excitement is one comment Autocar noted in its original road test of the car (13 February 2013), and it's here I stand firmly behind Rimell's riposte about his car's level of engagement to the 'average' driver. The same thoughts apply to my BlueGT.

A contemporary Polo GTI still might be ultimately more fun (particularly in facelifted Mk5 1.8-litre turbo guise, and even then hot Polos are dialled back compared with the Golf GTI), but the BlueGT's punch straight off the line and when overtaking on motorways is very pleasing indeed. Its 184lb ft of torque is exactly the same as the 1.4 TSI GTI's, making the car easily capable of passing slower traffic, even in sixth gear. The BlueGT's refinement, comfort and improved handling over a cooking Mk5 Polo also count in its favour.

Throw in cheaper insurance; hugely improved fuel economy (another parallel with Rimell's GTE), thanks to the 1.4-litre turbo engine's cylinder deactivation technology; a brighter-coloured interior; more standard kit; and handsome looks, courtesy of a unique bodykit that makes it hard to differentiate from the Polo GTI, and for me the car is a winner. A £20 annual road tax charge seals the deal.

Who said GTI drivers have all the fun?

Richard Gooding, Chelmsford, Essex

ROAD TO RUIN

I am currently facing a dilemma, as I am pretty much being compelled to change my vehicle. I have had the car for many years and it has suited me perfectly. Good performance, equivalent to Bond's Aston Martin DB5, and excellent handling, due to lowered, stiffened suspension and low-profile tyres. A super Porsche, Audi, BMW etc? Nope, it is a Skoda Fabia vRS. However, it cannot cope with A-roads in my county.

Recently I have suffered broken suspension, damaged steering and a blown tyre, all on A-roads, not on side streets. Driving at night and/or in heavy rain is out of the question. Therefore I am facing the prospect of buying something that I do not want, merely to go out unrestricted.

No doubt it will have to be 17 feet long by seven feet wide and weigh three tons, with wheels that would grace an airliner. But, looking on the bright side, I no doubt will be saving the planet.

Timothy Mear
Uckfield, East Sussex

AUTOMATIC DISMISSAL

I was kind of excited about the new Skoda Fabia 130 until I realised it's an automatic. A Fabia with 170bhp and a manual would be the hot hatch the Volkswagen Group has failed to make on that platform.

David Allen
Via Facebook

BEAMING IN MY BEEMER

It's a shame that the 1 Series model range no longer includes the 128ti, because BMW hit the sweet spot with this car.

The 265bhp 2.0-litre petrol engine pulls from idle like a diesel, thanks to its twin-scroll turbocharger, which then comes in again when instant hard acceleration is required, accompanied by a not-unpleasant growl. And yet I'm recording 41mpg from a mix of town and main road journeys.

The eight-speed automatic gearbox is so intuitive that the car can be driven in flowing traffic or on quiet roads without using the brakes. The paddles behind the steering wheel will override the auto if required.

The ride is firm but cushioned and deals with potholes better than my last two Volkswagen Golf GTIs. The 128ti feels more solid and one-piece compared with the GTI. The only downside is its comparatively slow, numb steering.

As the miles have increased, I have grown accustomed to and trust the grip, and I'm amazed by the Torsen differential. I've had some epic drives on the B-roads of Oxfordshire, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. I love the car.

Susan Trotman
Via email

Susan has great B-road larks in her 128ti

An old Abarth hatch? Sounds ace

Château de Londres, 2010 vintage

A NICE HOT ABARTH

Sorry to be an anorak, but the builder who was admiring Felix Page's Abarth 600e ('Sting in the tale', 1 October) would have to have been working in mainland Europe to have owned a Fiat Ritmo Abarth 125TC. Unfortunately we were denied that wonderful car here in the UK and had to wait for Fiat to offer the later 130TC here under the Strada badge. We had a couple at the time and it did indeed sound like a Spitfire – a thoroughly intoxicating exhaust note, which is the one failing of the current Abarths, sadly. At least my current Abarth 500 has a similar sound, which makes me smile every time I drive it.

Kevin Brock
Isle of Wight

A LOT OF BOTTLE

I was once out for a few drinks with someone linked to Nissan's London design studio, where the Juke was conceived. Although ironically not entirely sober at the time, they stated unequivocally that the lower front bumper on the original Juke was designed with wine in mind.

It was allegedly the result of a prank where a few people in the design studio wondered how much more distinctive the design could be and proposed adding a design feature such that it could physically hold several bottles of plonk.

I was told that they fully expected the eye-catching addition to be red-penned by the top brass but it was readily accepted as part of the design and went all the way to production.

One day, I'd love to find out if the story is true…

Tom C
Surrey

FEELING DEFLATED

On arriving home in our new Suzuki Swift, a close inspection confirmed – unsurprisingly – that there was no spare wheel. However, I was very surprised to find that the customary emergency tyre inflation kit was absent too. The only provision was the tow hook eye adapter – no get-you-home provision at all.

Assuming this must have been an oversight, I contacted the selling dealer, who said it was recent Suzuki policy to delete the equipment and I was advised to use the AA in case of a puncture.

I contacted Suzuki GB and after much apology it was confirmed that the factory no longer supplies emergency tyre inflation kits.

A check on the Suzuki accessories website confirmed these essential parts can be bought separately – but a spare wheel kit costs over £400.

The whole situation has dented my impression of Suzuki and spoiled the buying experience of what is otherwise a fantastically economical and likeable small car.

Steve Whiting
Oxfordshire

Suzuki confirmed this is true but noted that it sells an inflation kit for £58 – KC

P-LEASED AS PUNCH

Having decided to make our first foray into EV motoring, I duly did my research on home chargers and, encouraged by Autocar's positive feedback, opted for Andersen EV.

I'm pleased to report that the whole process from initial enquiry through to installation was excellent and my wife and I couldn't be happier with our personally specced A2 charger, which blends in nicely on the side of our house.

Not only are we new to EVs, we also have never leased a car before, and I was rather taken by a cracking two-year deal for a new Ford Puma Gen-E with TrustFord Direct.

Total cost for the two years on 5000 miles per year came in under £5000, which is much less than the depreciation we would suffer if we had actually bought the car – which is very much being enjoyed by my wife right now.

Simon Gerrard
Via email

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 5 NOVEMBER

FIRST DRIVE

ALPINE A390

Has Dieppe succeeded in its mission to transform the Renault Megane into an electric A110 for five? We find out

INSIGHT

HOW KIA PLANS TO SHAKE UP THE VAN MARKET

The inside line on its radical new range of electric commercial vehicles

ROAD TEST

PEUGEOT 208

Health check on this ageing yet still incredibly popular ICE supermini

EVERY WEEK

LIVING WITH A…

MAZDA CX-80

We say goodbye to this left-field seven-seat plug-in hybrid

USED GUIDE

FORD MUSTANG MACH-E

It may not be a 'real' Mustang, but is this hyped EV a good used buy?

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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Email autocar@haymarket.com
Editor Mark Tisshaw
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Content creator apprentice Sophia Grace

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTORS
European editor Greg Kable
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Business correspondent Nick Gibbs
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Senior correspondent John Evans
Senior contributing writer Andrew Frankel
Regular contributors John Bradshaw, Richard Bremner, Alastair Clements, Tim Dickson, James Disdale, Peter Liddiard, Peter McSean, Richard Webber

MEDIA ENQUIRIES
Email autocar@haymarket.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Tel 0344 848 8816
Overseas +44 (0)1604 251450
Email subscriptions.team@haymarket.com

SYNDICATION ENQUIRIES
Tel +44 (0)1962 867705
Contact Simon Fox
(simon@foxsyndication.com)

LICENSING ENQUIRIES
Contact Kate Hannam
(kate.hannam@haymarket.com)

BACK ISSUES
Tel 0344 848 8816
Email help@autocar.themagazineshop.com

ADVERTISING
Head of trading and agency development Richard Potton
(richard.potton@haymarket.com)
Account manager (display) Millie Remie
(millie.remie@haymarket.com)

PUBLISHING
Newstrade marketing manager
Isabella McDermid
Newstrade marketing executive
Lance Pereira

PRODUCTION
Tel +44 (0)20 8267 5639
Head of production operations
Trevor Simpson
Group production manager Ailsa Donovan

MANAGEMENT
Managing director Rachael Prasher
Marketing director Darren Pitt

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+49 (0)531 38004-0
info@haymarket.de

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FIRST DRIVES

THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

28 HONDA PRELUDE

30 PORSCHE 911 TURBO S

34 BMW M2 CS

38 MG IM6

HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time – either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

TESTED 18.10.25, EMILIA-ROMAGNA, ITALY **DELIVERIES** SPRING 2026

FERRARI 296 SPECIALE

Evolution of V6 plug-in hybrid supercar is billed as the "most fun to drive, emotionally charged" Ferrari yet

There are facts the first-time 296 Speciale pilot needs to consider. One is that this car has the lowest polar moment of inertia of any current Ferrari. Another is that it is the most powerful purely rear-driven model the company makes. It doesn't take Adrian Newey-level intelligence to realise this combination could result in something profoundly thrilling – or just frightening.

Chief test driver Raffaele de Simone assures me it's the former, but suspicion lingers. The night before my drive of the 868bhp Speciale at Fiorano and in the Apennines, I ask if it's all getting, y'know, out of hand. Remember that the regular 296 GTB makes 49bhp less, weighs 60kg more and is set up more conservatively yet will light up its rears in fourth-gear corners. Fifth, even.

"The point of no return is the point at which you're not able to manage the power of the car any more. We make a step only if we give you the tools to manage that extra power," says de Simone, before ominously adding that he thinks "we're pretty on the limit".

The next morning, I take to the track in glorious sunshine, and before lap one is complete de Simone is vindicated. Even more resplendent than its Verde Nürburgring paint is the way the Speciale makes 550bhp per tonne unnervingly manageable.

There's an animal wildness to the 488 Pista's heavier yet superior successor, and you could of course have a sizeable incident in any car of this ilk. Yet my sense is that you would need to be driving like a pillock for things to go badly awry. The Speciale has all of the GTB's forgiving exuberance, only with more mechanical transparency and raw theatre. And speed. God, the speed. It's breathtaking.

So, while you can debate the wisdom of spending the £100k surcharge the Speciale demands over the GTB, you can't deny that it is an outstanding supercar and one that is, I'm very pleased to report, emotionally fulfilling, childish stripes and all.

So what makes the Speciale special? Part of its added bite is achieved through the usual tricks of perception. Strapped into the harnesses, you can see both the louvres cut into the carbonfibre bonnet and, in the rear-view mirror, the striking winglets that flank the rear deck. It also gets two more resonators in the bulkhead, which channel curated frequencies from the 8500rpm V6 directly into the cabin.

Notably high-pitched and breathily raucous, this remains one of the great turbo engines, and here it benefits from new ▸

TESTER'S NOTE

The engineers say the Speciale package could in theory work with another 120bhp but to give the chassis a chance they would need to increase the rear weight bias from 60% to about 65% in the interests of traction. It would be a quicker car on the straights but not in the corners. **RL**

> “On a road that would make a 911 GT3 very jittery indeed, it moves in the same oleaginous manner as the GTB”

◂ titanium conrods and stud bolts (a Formula 1-ism that's a first for a street-legal Ferrari), as well as a lightened crank similar to that of the F80. A little machining after casting has also trimmed around a kilo of metal from the block compared with the GTB's unit.

Even without electric assistance, this V6 now makes an Enzo-slaying 690bhp and 556lb ft. With electrical assistance, the outcome is a car that, in de Simone's skilled hands and wearing serious Michelins, laps Fiorano quicker than the LaFerrari.

That electrical element is largely the same as that of the GTB. A 7.5kWh drive battery nestles on the floorpan behind the firewall, feeding an axial-flux electric motor between engine and the eight-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox.

Disarmingly, it's the first taste of the Speciale you get. Started up in Hybrid mode, it pulls off the mark under electric power alone. This car's namesake – the legendarily brash 458 Speciale – was somewhat otherwise inclined, but in truth it's nice to have a fire-breathing Ferrari that can slink away without fanfare, if you would prefer. Anybody who wants start-up drama need only select Performance mode on the e-manettino then hit the haptic engine-start button. In the pit at Fiorano, with a hot titanium exhaust, the resulting crackle-bang can be deafening.

The tech-fetishist side of Ferrari (presumably the same faction responsible for calling stability electronics 'Side Slip Control 9.0' and giving the Speciale's deploying rear spoiler an 'Armed' setting) clearly wanted to do something jazzy with the electric element.

The approach is twofold. First, shifts are more violent. Ask for an upshift in one of the car's racier modes and the burst of torque the motor injects into the vacuum created as the transmission engages the next cog gives a vicious, visceral kick. It's a bit contrived, but I'd be lying if I said it wasn't bloody exciting, and boy do you know you're in a Speciale. The shifts don't quite have the diamond-cut quality you get from the PDK in Porsche's 911 GT3, but their explosivity reminds me of the pneumatic sequential action of an actual GT3 car, which is arguably cooler.

Then there's 'Extra Boost'. At Fiorano or on any other track, the car will learn the circuit and in its 'Qualify' drive mode will then push the drive battery beyond its normal limits for short bursts. It lets the motor deliver up to 178bhp on the exits of corners. Is it noticeable? Not in four or five short laps.

You spend the first couple in Race mode, discovering just how hard (and not always that deftly) the traction control needs to work unless the car is perfectly straight. It gets jarring, so you quickly opt for the famous CT Off mode.

From then on, hilariously, there always seems to be some degree of yaw. The Speciale pivots very quickly indeed, but so sublimely sped is the steering and so balanced is the car that the relationship between throttle, backside and rear tyres often feels symbiotic.

New suspension drops ride height 5mm and allows 13% less lean

Electrified turbo V6 has received a number of significant upgrades

There's no central screen, so all functions reside in digital driver's display

Lighter seats and button-clad steering wheel are bespoke to Speciale

In faster corners the new aero package (see right) gets to work, but this isn't a downforce car like some in the class, in which you easily notice the effects. It's more about straightforward mechanical grip in the face of an outrageous powertrain. Quite old-school, then.

Ferrari swapped me into a different car for on-road driving. Rather than fixed-rate Multimatic dampers with titanium springs and £21k carbonfibre wheels, this had the standard Magneride dampers. Crucially, this set-up retains the 'Bumpy Road' mode for which modern Ferraris are well known.

Does the Speciale look a bit silly out in public, with its concoction of gills and wings? Yes and no. The tail lacks the sweeping gravitas of the 488 Pista's, but in these hazy hills, resting on some unexpected Group A Skyline-style five-spokers, with sunlight cascading over its considerable hips and the bone line in the flanks, it looks the bomb.

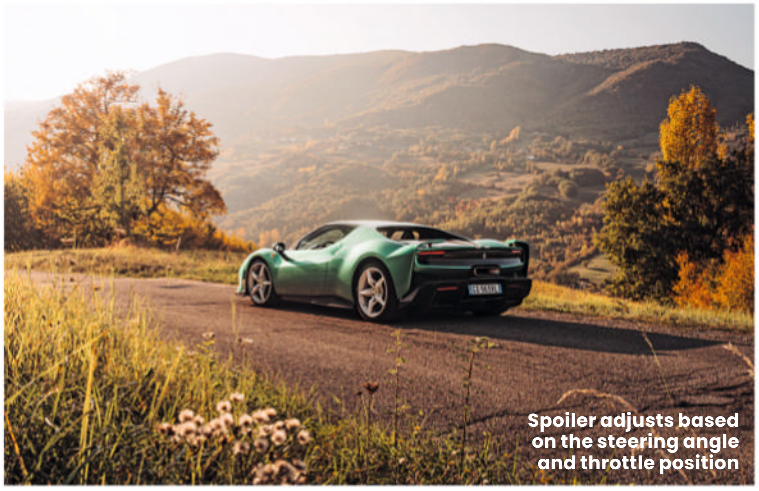
On the Magneride dampers it drives beautifully too. Like a road car. Nobody else in mainstream supercars does 'taut flow' like they currently do in Maranello. On a road that would make a 911 GT3 very jittery indeed, the Speciale moves in the same oleaginous manner as the GTB, only with a fraction more meat in the steering and touch more intent in the body control.

Its intuitive adjustability also remains undimmed by the choppiness of these Italian roads. The engine makes three-quarters of its torque max at only 3200rpm or so, so you don't even need to wring it out to work the chassis. It's a chassis that almost has a sentience about it in the way it knows whether you want grip or slip. Can it feel artificial? At times just a little, but it's so much fun that you really won't care. Any car with this degree of inbuilt humour will make believers of the cynics.

Admittedly it's tempting to be cynical. Track-inspired Ferraris have always existed uncomfortably. Like Rolex Submariners that never see the sea, few Speciales will ever sniff circuit asphalt – not at £13k for a new carbonfibre bumper.

It's just as well, then, that the Speciale is even more appealing as a road car, deftly enhancing the brilliance of the GTB. It's a classic case of diminishing returns, and things like the lack of bins in the carbonfibre door cards (no speaker grilles, just drill holes) do irk. But you indulge a machine this good in a little whimsy, don't you?

RICHARD LANE



Spoiler adjusts based on the steering angle and throttle position

AERO CHANGES

The 296 Speciale borrows its aerodynamic concepts from the 296 Challenge racer, resulting in a 20% increase in downforce over the 296 GTB.

The quoted figure of 435kg at 155mph is still comfortably less than what Porsche's 911 GT3 RS generates, but Ferrari prefers to not fit huge wings. The Speciale instead uses an evolution of the GTB's pop-up rear spoiler, which along with low-drag and high-downforce settings now has a midway point for high-speed downforce. It's also 50% faster-acting than on the GTB.

The underbody is key, too. Like the 488 Pista, the Speciale features an S-duct at the front, although the tract that links the floor with the upper surface is much more upright and set further back, exiting just beneath the windscreen. Not only does this help maintain luggage space but it also helps keep downforce consistent even as ride height changes.

More broadly, the balance of downforce has been shifted forward for turn-in precision.

TECH SPEC

FERRARI 296 SPECIALE

Wild on track, sensational on the road and worthy of the name. Choose your damper wisely

Price £359,779

Engine V6, 2992cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor

Power 868bhp at 8000rpm

Torque 557lb ft (engine), 232lb ft (motor)

Gearbox 8-spd dual-clutch automatic, RWD

Dry weight 1410kg

0-62mph 2.8sec

Top speed 206mph

Battery 7.5kWh

Economy na

Electric range 15 miles

CO_2, tax band na

Rivals Chevrolet Corvette Z06, Maserati MC20 GT2 Stradale, Porsche 911 GT3

TESTED 7.10.25, NICE, FRANCE **DELIVERIES** MARCH 2026

HONDA PRELUDE

Yes, it really is a new cheap sports coupé – but there's a zeitgeisty twist

When Honda announced that it was going to make a new Prelude, you would have been forgiven for assuming it was going to be another crossover and not taking much notice, just to avoid disappointment. Such things do happen. Yet even though SUVs have replaced coupés for many as the moderately fashionable daily driver, Honda really was going to breathe new life into the mainstream two-door.

Picking up the tradition from the early 2000s as if nothing had changed, Honda's new coupé is based on a mid-sized hatchback. Given the Accord has long been absent from Europe, the Civic was the starting point.

As a hatchback, it's already an understatedly handsome car that's pretty good to drive, which is promising. The coupé then gets a shorter wheelbase and suspension that has been tightened up with the help of some Type R-flavoured bits (they're not literally from the Civic Type R, since the mounting and geometry is different).

Chief among those are the dual-axis front struts, which reduce torque steer and give more feedback, the adaptive dampers and the solid rather than fluid-filled compliance bushes for the rear axle. In general, the set-up is softer than on the Civic Type R, because this needs to be a liveable daily driver first. The Prelude's whole structure is also stiffer than the Civic's.

Sounds like it's all made to be paired with a slightly detuned Civic Type R engine, right? Failing that, the 1.5-litre turbo from the American Civic Si would also do the trick. Well, it's 2025 and Honda doesn't sell many EVs, so it's having to watch every gram of CO_2. As a result, the Prelude gets the same 181bhp hybrid system as the Civic, albeit with a trick up its sleeve.

Honda's people say it's the best solution for this car because it has so much torque, but let's be honest: fun things are rarely the 'best' solution to any given problem.

The trick to make this hybrid more exciting is eight simulated gears. Adding fake gears to a CVT or a hybrid transmission that behaves like one is nothing new – various Toyotas and Subarus do it – and the result is underwhelming. The difference is that in Honda's hybrid system, the engine doesn't drive the wheels except at a constant cruise; usually, it drives a generator to feed electricity to the big drive motor or the battery. So as long as the generator is being spun quickly enough to produce enough juice, the engine can do whatever the software deems appropriate. It can be at low revs; its revs can be rising and falling; it could play a grumbly rendition of Jingle Bells (it doesn't actually do that, because Honda's CEO isn't Elon Musk). More to the point, it can pretend to have the world's fastest automatic gearbox.

There's a hint of Porsche here – for £13k less than the basic 718 Cayman

TESTER'S NOTE
The lane keeping aid is pretty unintrusive, but the only way to turn off the speed limit warning bong is to go deep into the touchscreen menus with the car in Park. Pretty irritating. **IV**

Interior has a Civic vibe, largely to its credit; the driver's display is 10.2in

> **"In many ways the Prelude rides and handles like the Civic Type R but better"**

Because an Atkinson-cycle four-cylinder unit doesn't in itself tend to sound very good, its sound is augmented by the speakers.

It sort of works. The sound is quite believable and the 'gearbox' is very active in the way it downshifts when you're slowing for corners. Manual upshifts with the paddles are faster than with any real gearbox.

The immersion is broken, however, when you try to power out of a hairpin in third and it downshifts or when you don't make a gearchange for a few seconds and it upshifts.

Brembo brakes will be standard

There's no locked manual mode, because that would seemingly cause trouble with the WLTP economy figure. It's a missed opportunity, as Honda hasn't finished the job.

I found myself leaving the car in its standard mode, where it still simulates some shifts to break the CVT-style tedium but doesn't do the whole gearbox schtick.

This powertrain will be very pleasant and economical in everyday use, and it just about does the job when you're having fun, but there's no doubt the chassis deserves a more exciting partner.

That's because in many ways the Prelude rides and handles like the Civic Type R but better. The steering is quick but fluid and linear, with a really natural build-up of weight. The balance is keen, agile and adjustable and, with a bit less grip than its hatchback sibling, the Prelude's limits are more approachable on the road. The ride is taut but totally tolerable for a sporting model.

The interior is mostly Civic but slightly funkier. The dashboard and centre console are a bit swoopier, the rear seats (cloth rather than leather like the fronts) are marginal and the boot is surprisingly deep. The luggage cover is flimsy and any overweight dog will need craning in.

Judging the new Prelude is a question of positioning. The Preludes of old that are in our collective memory (whether we've individually driven one or not) are the angry, screaming VTEC ones. Judge it by that standard and you will be disappointed – even though it does have the chassis for it. Remember that coupés used to be mainstream – simply a more stylish take on the everyday hatchback – and the Prelude makes more sense.

It costs £40,995, and other than a couple of paint colours there are no options. That's pretty similar to the BMW 220i Coupé in a similar spec – arguably the Prelude's only rival. Despite the BMW's drive going to the 'correct' end, its chassis doesn't really feel any more pedigree, over-sprung and over-tyred as it is.

As something different from the SUV norm, an everyday car with a bit of style and handling panache, the Prelude is really rather agreeable.

ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

HONDA PRELUDE

Not the sports car that the bumf and Type R bits promise, but quietly sporting and satisfying all the same

Price £40,995
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1993cc, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 181bhp
Torque 232lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1480kg
0-62mph 8.2sec
Top speed 117mph
Economy 54.3mpg
CO_2, tax band 117g/km, 29%
Rivals BMW 220i, Mercedes-Benz CLE 200

TESTED 18.10.25, MALAGA, SPAIN **DELIVERIES** DECEMBER

PORSCHE 911 TURBO S

Hybrid power pushes most serious non-GT variant 911 beyond 700bhp

This is the latest Porsche 911 Turbo S: the facelift of the 992 generation, or the 992.2 in Porsche speak. But with it has come such a raft of mechanical changes that it might as well be a new-generation car – and just about the most complete all-round supercar there has perhaps ever been at that.

Is the 911 a supercar? A definition for another time, perhaps. We tend to think of those as mid-engined, more exotically constructed and lower to the ground than the 911, which can even be had with two rear seats. But what else would you call a car that makes 701bhp, can do 0-62mph in 2.5sec, can hit 200mph and costs all but £200,000?

Key to those performance figures is the adoption, as we knew was coming, of the new hybridised 3.6-litre flat-six engine that made its debut in the 911 GTS last year, called T-Hybrid. Mechanically much of it is the same as in that application: the same block is married to an eight-speed dual-clutch transmission that has an 80bhp electric motor between the engine and the clutch.

Drive is never provided by the motor alone: this 400V electrical system is about performance rather than economy. And with such a level of urge, this Turbo S is 14 seconds quicker around the Nordschleife than its predecessor (not a figure I'd normally note, but that is an awful lot, isn't it?).

The adoption of the high-voltage system means the engine is shorn of various pumps and ancillaries that would normally live atop the

Wider rear wheels have given it an even beefier look than before

> “Some have previously found it a little cold, a little too perfect. Not a bit of it. Not this time”

block, making the engine itself a little lower, with the space left above occupied by high-voltage systems.

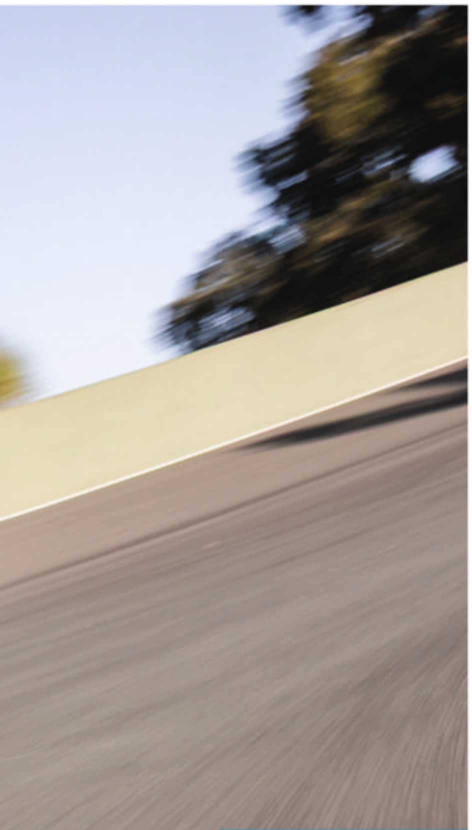
The most notable difference between the GTS and the Turbo S is that in place of one turbocharger there are two, slightly smaller in diameter but able to spin faster – up to 145,000rpm rather than 125,000rpm. As in the GTS, they're electrically assisted. Some of my colleagues will tell me that means they're technically superchargers, not turbochargers, but they're still fundamentally boosted by exhaust gases. The electric motor between the compressor and the turbine is there to get them spinning quickly and to slow them and return energy to the modestly 1.9kWh battery (weighing 27kg), which lives near the front of the car.

Suspension is by MacPherson struts at the front and a multi-link arrangement at the rear, with adaptive dampers and, more significantly, active anti-roll bars. These are driven off the 400V system, which makes them much more responsive; likewise the rear-wheel steering.

If all of this sounds complicated, I think you're right, but Porsche is better at tuning complex dynamic systems better than perhaps anyone bar Ferrari, which has a smaller operating breadth anyway.

Full digital instruments and a great-size steering wheel with drive mode button on it

Dynamic character is beyond reproach despite weight gain



If it also sounds a little heavy, again you're correct. The Turbo S weighs 85kg more than before, at 1725kg, and this is now measured without rear seats (because those are now a no-cost option), which would add another few.

It's just inevitable with all of the additional hybrid hardware, which accounts for about 65kg of the gain, with bigger brakes (420mm and 410mm carbon-ceramics front and rear respectively), wider rear wheels (with 10mm-wider, 325-section rear tyres) than before to cope with the additional power, plus the body now has to be around 10kg heavier after some strengthening to meet latest legislation. The exhaust is made of titanium, saving around 7kg, but the weight is what it is.

Frank Moser, vice-president of Porsche's 911 and 718 model lines, tells me that I won't feel the weight gain – and I think he's mostly right.

My drive comes in a coupé on relatively good Spanish roads to the Ascari race circuit. And on these it's really precise, very responsive for overtakes, as you would expect, with medium-weighted and geared but incredibly accurate steering, and it feels impeccably well tuned.

It rides really well, you wouldn't know the active rear steer is doing its thing (Porsche does do such systems better than anyone) and I could imagine commuting in it in summer or putting on a set of winter tyres and heading to the Alps in winter. It's an 'and' car; it will do the lot.

That has meant that on circuit some people have previously found the Turbo S a little cold, a little too perfect. Not a bit of it. Not this time. In its more tightly suspended drive modes, body control is impeccable, some roll and pitch is allowed to lean reassuringly against, there's a hint of understeer that can be quelled with power or trailed braking and it really moves around if you want it to.

It feels like there's tremendous integrity too. This being a Porsche, I drove the car off the road, straight onto the circuit and ragged the bejesus out of it, with no drama, no fires, just some monitoring of the tyre pressures.

Interior? 911-slick. Fit and finish? First rate. Refinement? Excellent.

In short, they've done it again. The world's most complete supercar, made more so.

MATT PRIOR

TECH SPEC

PORSCHE 911 TURBO S

The most complete supercar, made better to drive, more comfortable and faster. Nothing does it better

Price £199,100
Engine 6 cyls horizontally opposed, 3591cc, twin-turbo, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 701bhp at 6500rpm
Torque 590lb ft at 2300-6000rpm
Gearbox 8-spd dual-clutch automatic, RWD
Kerb weight 1725kg
0-62mph 2.5sec
Top speed 200mph
Economy 24.4mpg
CO_2, tax band 262g/km, 37%
Rivals Aston Martin Vantage, Ferrari Amalfi, Mercedes-AMG GT 63

TESTER'S NOTE

A new metallic grey trim material, Turbonite, has arrived on Porsches recently. Cheesy name, looks quite good. **MP**

TESTED 18.10.25, IBIZA, SPAIN **DELIVERIES** JANUARY 2026

SEAT IBIZA

Brand awakens from coma to lightly revamp eight-year-old supermini

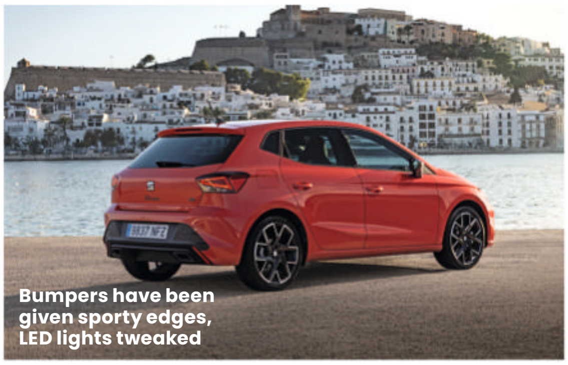
It's no coincidence that Seat chose David Guetta's Forever Young to soundtrack the ad campaign for this updated Ibiza. The fifth-generation supermini celebrated its eighth birthday earlier this year and the Spanish brand is hoping that a carefully considered nip and tuck will be enough to keep it feeling fresh.

The exterior changes amount to slightly sharper contours around the front and rear bumpers and new LED lights at either end. Inside, it gets some new soft-touch materials and, in the range-topping FR trim tested, a set of supportive, well-cushioned bucket seats.

While the changes are restrained, in this case that's not cause for criticism. The Ibiza's old-school feel means it's among the most intuitive cars around, with clicky buttons and dials for the climate controls and on the steering wheel – which is actually round. If you have any gripes with the interior design trends of late, the restrained Ibiza is well worth a look.

The driving position is sound too, even for those plumper of waist, with well-placed pedals, plenty of room for your legs and all the other controls situated where you intuitively expect them to be.

The assault of black plastics creates a dour ambience, but there isn't a single creak or rattle. Given that Seat is being repositioned as the Volkswagen Group's entry-level brand, this feels up to par.


Bumpers have been given sporty edges, LED lights tweaked

Cabin is retrimmed but not redesigned, which is fine with us

The only real glitches are the infotainment touchscreen's laggy responses and the lack of clear access to the ADAS menu: it's buried in the digital instrument panel and access to it isn't clearly marked.

Initially, only one engine will be offered in the UK: a 1.0-litre turbo triple. It can be had with 94bhp and a five-speed manual gearbox or 113bhp and either a six-speed manual or a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic, as tested here.

It's a perfectly sufficient combination: torquey and refined at town speeds, with enough grunt to get up to motorway pace within the length of a slip road. The DSG's upshifts are rapid and well timed to make the most of the narrow torque band, although it takes a moment to kick down under a heavy throttle.

European buyers are also offered a 1.5-litre turbo four with 148bhp. I didn't get to try this in the Ibiza, but in the related Arona crossover (review next week) it was markedly less refined than the 1.0-litre and didn't feel substantially punchier.

The Ibiza's air of overall competence is aided by its handling. The steering is accurate and precise and body movements are well controlled both vertically and laterally, instilling a sense of confidence on twistier back roads. It doesn't deliver much feedback, however, and feels too light even in the FR's Sport mode.

This isn't a fun car – it simply isn't communicative enough to immerse a keen driver, nor is the engine all that charismatic – but it is very effective at making progress without fuss.

The ride remains composed when crossing expansion joints at speed and larger obstacles don't send a jolt into the cabin: they're nicely rounded off. Cars in lower trims – with smaller alloys than the FR's 17s – should prove even comfier, although we have yet to sample these following the facelift.

The Ibiza, then, seems as strong as it ever was. As some key rivals fall by the wayside (the Ford Fiesta, Kia Rio and 'real' Mazda 2 have died and the Renault Clio is about to go on hiatus until 2027), it seems set to grasp a new lease of life.

CHARLIE MARTIN

TECH SPEC

SEAT IBIZA 1.0 TSI 115 FR DSG

Refreshingly simple both to operate and drive and well priced to boot. Shame it's a bit gloomy to sit in

Price £24,500 (est)
Engine 3 cyls in line, 999cc, turbo, petrol
Power 113bhp at 5500rpm
Torque 148lb ft at 2000-3500rpm
Gearbox 7-spd dual-clutch automatic, FWD
Kerb weight 1178kg
0-62mph 9.9sec
Top speed 124mph
Economy 54.3mpg
CO_2, tax band 117-131g/km, 29-32%
Rivals Hyundai i20, Peugeot 208, Renault Clio

TESTER'S NOTE

Refreshingly, the ADAS functions aren't that intrusive here. Even the speed warning buzzer isn't too annoying, sounding just once when you exceed the detected limit. **CM**

TESTER'S NOTE
The rotary gear selector solves two crucial problems: it doesn't impede access to the phone charger when in park or the volume knob when in drive. Pity it doesn't have a stop for each position. **FP**

TESTED 21.10.25, PISA, ITALY **DELIVERIES** JANUARY 2026

ALFA ROMEO TONALE

Can fresh look and PHEV upgrades improve family crossover's fortunes?

Fewer than 3000 Tonales have found homes in the UK since the crossover's 2022 launch. In the same period, Audi has sold more than 45,000 Q3s and even the ageing Range Rover Evoque and Volvo XC40 have outpaced the Alfa Romeo by a factor of at least 10 to one. So it's no surprise the firm hasn't waited longer to release a facelifted version.

Visually, this update centres on bringing the Tonale into line with its new little brother, the Junior. There's an aggressive new front end with a centrally mounted numberplate, bigger air intakes inspired by the snorting Giulia GTA super-saloon (pizzico di sale etc), a shorter front overhang and a new monochrome badge. Alfa has also added a raft of new colours, there's a funky new 'cannelloni' ribbed upholstery option for the seats and the chunky gearlever has made way for a less intrusive rotary selector.

This remains one of the more charismatic and inviting cabins in this segment, with neat touches like the 'cannocchiale' dash cluster and wheel-mounted start button and a decent mix of colours and fabrics differentiating it from the greyscapes of rivals. Extra points for a touchscreen that's no larger than it needs to be and retention of plenty of physical switchgear.

Mechanical tweaks are slight, and are mainly focused on making the engines compliant with the new Euro 6e emissions rules – as a result of which the 1.3-litre mild hybrid has been boosted by 15bhp to 173bhp and the 1.5-litre PHEV (tested here) has dropped from 276bhp to 266bhp. Not that you will notice the deficit on the road.

You're more likely to remark on the upgrades Alfa has made to the general refinement of this hybrid arrangement, which previously felt clunky and under-developed.

Cockpit exudes driver appeal. The driving itself, sadly, does not

It's much smoother and more intuitive now, slipping almost imperceptibly between electric and petrol power when pootling around in hybrid mode to the extent that you sometimes need to check which type of energy you're consuming.

The spell is shattered by the thrashy droning of the undersized 1.3-litre engine as you push on, and the gearbox – however enticingly tactile the aluminium shift paddles may be – is simply too ponderous in its responses to encourage exuberance. It hesitates slightly on manual shifts and when you leave it to its own devices it needs a second to decide on a plan of action on kickdown or corner exit.

It's worth noting, too, that the new Q3 E-hybrid offers about 50% more electric-only range and can rapid-charge at 50kW, making this car's 7.4kW maximum rate feel old hat.

The Tonale's chassis has been largely left alone. There's a 10mm increase in track width for improved poise and response, but the resulting improvements are more visual than dynamic.

Ultimately, it remains impossible to draw any parallels between the behaviour of the Tonale and its scintillating rear-driven Giulia and Stelvio siblings. The steering is quick but disconcertingly devoid of feedback or weight, so you never relish the opportunity to chuck it into a hairpin. It ends up just feeling slightly twitchy and excitable – and especially so because the Tonale's significant mass isn't especially well controlled through the curves, meaning it rolls and pitches more than its quasi-sporting image would suggest.

The premium crossover market is hardly over-endowed with propositions for the keen driver, and it's this shortcoming that Alfa has sought to address with the Tonale, pitching it as a more charismatic and emotional alternative to the stalwarts, but these light-touch tweaks don't go far enough to make it the family PHEV that encourages you to take the long way round.

FELIX PAGE

TECH SPEC

ALFA ROMEO TONALE PLUG-IN HYBRID Q4 SPORT SPECIALE

Marginal tweaks add up to a slightly more rounded proposition, but it's no more of an Alfa than it was

Price £54,000 (est)
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1332cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 266bhp
Torque 285lb ft (est)
Gearbox 6-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 1835kg
0-62mph 6.6sec
Top speed 128mph
Battery 15.5kWh
Economy 257mpg
Electric range 38 miles
CO_2, tax band 26g/km, 13%
Rivals Audi Q3 E-hybrid, BMW X1 xDrive30e

UK VERDICTS

TESTED 22.10.25, CUMBRIA **DELIVERIES** NOW

BMW M2 CS

Accomplished junior coupé gets 523bhp Competition Sport treatment

The M division's modern approach to conjuring mid-life interest in its products could easily rouse the cynic in you. Now that we've had CS and in some cases even CSL versions of just about all the really core M cars of the past decade or so, the pattern is so well set that we might wonder if it's beginning to make its regular ones a little less special, in order for enough weight-saving, power-boosting and driveline-enhancing fairy dust to be kept back for the Competition Sport specials. Frankly, how could it not be?

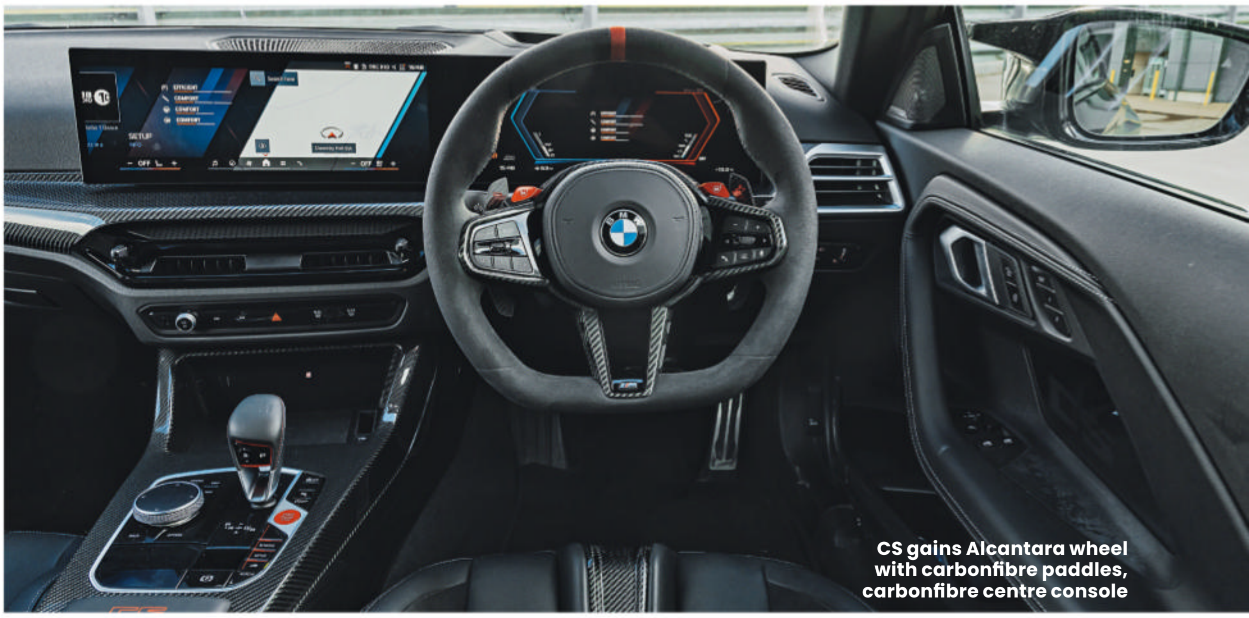
However, when the latest bit of that strategy is made manifest in a car like the M2 CS, cynicism becomes rather harder to maintain. By 'harder' I mean impossible, quite honestly. There's just an abiding sense of rightness – righteousness, even – about the new M2 CS. It's the consummation of something right at the core of the M division's identity – and so wonderfully executed and significant that it almost feels wholesome.

Being a compact, rear-driven, no-nonsense sports coupé, the M2 was already precisely the sort of car you would expect BMW's in-house tuner to treat as the foundation of its business. It doesn't, because in reality it isn't. But somehow the grubby facts of the moment need to be kept out of way in this instance. This is precisely the type, size and style of BMW that enters your mind's eye when you imagine an M car. And so now that the M division has turned the limelight of its gaze towards it, righted some of its wrongs and given it qualities that turn it into a proper, world-class driver's car, it feels like it has repented its transgressions (need we really name them?), rediscovered its old priorities and purged its soul.

So how exactly has it done that? For a start, with one of those nicely understated modern performance cars that you have to look twice at to realise what you're in the presence of. At the front, the M2 CS has new air intakes and front diffuser trim, and as standard the carbonfibre-composite roof and mirror caps that are optional on the regular M2. But it doesn't really give up its secrets until you're gazing at its rump (very likely as it overtakes you), when you will clock its different CFRP diffuser

With 50bhp more and 30kg less than standard, CS's performance and handling are outstanding

“It feels more forthcoming in just about everything it does and ordinary in just about nothing”



CS gains Alcantara wheel with carbonfibre paddles, carbonfibre centre console

TESTER’S NOTE

Because BMW didn’t do any silly chucking out of the back seats, this remains a usable four-seater with a proper boot. The M Carbon front buckets and lack of a cupholder might irk in daily driving, but I think I’d find a way to cope. **MS**

and the new lightweight bootlid with its exaggerated ‘built-in’ ducktail spoiler.

Compared with the standard eight-speed automatic M2 (you can’t get a manual M2 CS, but that’s perhaps not such a tragic loss given the ergonomic flaws of the M2’s three-pedal layout), the homologated weight is some 30kg lighter than the car on which it’s based – thanks not least to its staggered-size forged alloy wheels.

But a great many ‘real’ examples will be lighter still. For one, because this is the only M2 on which you can get optional carbon-ceramic brakes. And for another, because there’s a titanium exhaust, specially developed for the car by the M division and strategically added to the M Performance tuning parts catalogue, that’s sure to be quite a lot lighter than the car’s standard active pipes. You can have it fitted by your dealer – and, we can safely assume, it will make BMW’s ‘S58’ twin-turbocharged straight six (up 50bhp and 37lb ft on the regular M2’s) about as noisy as the engineers would have liked it to be if not for those dastardly homologation requirements.

The M2 CS rides on shorter and firmer coil springs than the standard M2; its adaptive dampers, power steering and rear differential have been recalibrated; and its engine mounts are stiffer. It feels sharper, rawer, tinglier and more forthcoming in just about everything it does and ordinary in just about nothing.

Even at normal road speeds the steering has the feel, fluency and crispness that the standard M2 at times lacks, so you can guide the car with a confident precision at least a couple of notional levels greater. That occasional little bit of excess squatting body movement over bumps that the regular M2 has? Gone.

The M2 CS’s chassis is flatter but also keener, so on track it takes a cornering line quicker and feels even more adjustable on the throttle when you start to investigate just how often, how controllably and how indulgently it will slither its way through a bend.

It has power and response to burn in any of its lower intermediate gears when you do want to animate its rear-drive chassis. But thanks to BMW’s excellent – if slightly intimidatingly complex – array of drive modes and stability control settings, there’s nothing to fear from it if you just want ‘fast, honest, composed and secure’ instead.

In short, this is the front-engined, rear-driven, compact, classic M car made modern but done with a vivid, reverent, captivating brilliance.

The pace and positivity of the M2 CS’s steering, not to mention the potency of its turbocharged mid-range power delivery, the outright tenacity of its grip level and the fact that it doesn’t have an absolutely rubbish automated manual gearbox, distort comparisons with the much-exalted E46-generation M3 CSL. Yet you can’t help making them.

The dynamic heights to which this car has been taken bring to mind some of the M division’s very rarest and most memorable successes. It bears comparison with the greatest driver’s cars on sale right now – and you could have two of them for the price of one averagely equipped Porsche 911 GT3.

Anyone still feeling cynical? I very much hope not.

MATT SAUNDERS

TECH SPEC

BMW M2 CS

Junior M car’s driving experience hits very special heights and brings celebrated antecedents to mind.

A feelgood performance car in more ways than one

★★★★★

Price £92,475

Engine 6 cyls in line, 2993cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol

Power 523bhp at 6250rpm

Torque 479lb ft at 2750-5730rpm

Gearbox 8-spd automatic, RWD

Kerb weight 1700kg

0-62mph 3.8sec

Top speed 188mph

Economy 28.2mpg

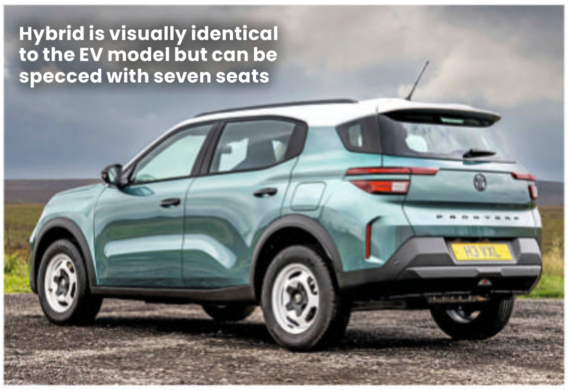
CO_2, tax band 226g/km, 37%

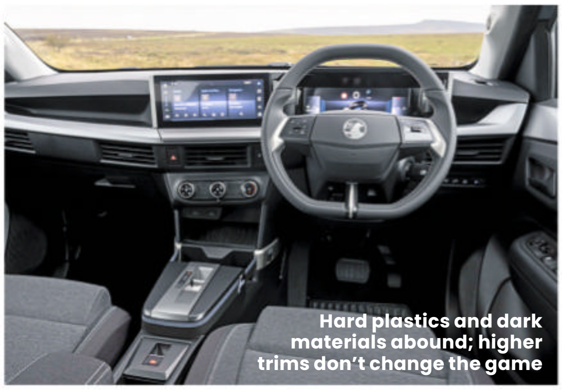
Rivals Alpine A110 R, Mercedes-AMG GT 43, Porsche 911 Carrera

TESTED 21.10.25, WILTSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

VAUXHALL FRONTERA HYBRID 145

Low-cost small crossover belatedly arrives in right-hand-drive form


Hybrid is visually identical to the EV model but can be specced with seven seats


Hard plastics and dark materials abound; higher trims don't change the game

Vauxhall wants to be one of the UK's three best-selling car brands again, and the new Frontera is key to that ambition. An Astra-sized crossover available with either hybrid or electric power, it's being thrust right into one of the hottest battlegrounds in today's market.

The ace up the Frontera's sleeve is its bargain price: the EV starts at just £22,995 (after a £1500 government grant) and the hybrid at £24,885. Although punchy, it's a few grand more than the closely related Citroën C3 Aircross's £21,105 entry price (which is due to that car being available as a pure petrol with a manual gearbox) and on par with the notably larger Dacia Bigster.

Step inside the Frontera and the concessions needed to hit its aggressive price point are revealed. The plastics feel quite low-rent and there are more shades and textures of black than I had time to count.

The GS and Ultimate trims don't provide enough of an improvement, so if you can live without a heated seat or steering wheel, stick with Design and save a few grand.

The trade-off for mediocre materials is two 10.0in screens (one for instruments, the other for infotainment) with clear graphics and fast responses to inputs. There are also physical climate controls and everything feels well built.

Other than value, the Frontera's major attribute is its practicality. It's big enough in the back for adults to sit comfortably and there are plenty of storage cubbies dotted around. The boot is good too, being slightly larger than that in the Astra.

Only one engine is available: a 1.2-litre turbo petrol triple boosted by an electric motor for a combined 108bhp or 143bhp. Both versions are paired with a six-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox.

We drove the more powerful of the two, which feels urgent from a standstill and has no trouble getting the Frontera up to motorway speeds. When bumbling about town, it does a good job at fading into the background; at a cruise, the engine shuts off as much as possible and leaves the car to glide along electrically, making a noticeable difference to refinement.

Overtaking slow-moving traffic can generate a bit of a din, as the gearbox is eager to kick down and work the engine as hard as possible.

The motor sometimes continues to deliver power for a fraction of a second after you've lifted off the throttle, but it's nothing disastrous.

The handling is unremarkable: you turn and it turns in equal measure. The steering is strangely keen to return to centre, but it's acceptable. There's a fair bit of roll, but nothing as stomach-churning as in the lower-slung Citroën C3 based on the same Stellantis Smart Car platform. It all feels very safe.

Where the hybrid Frontera falls down is in its ride quality: it's fidgety at all speeds (the rear does a pogo-stick impression at 30mph on an especially dimpled road) and you get a sense the suspension is having to work very hard. It's exhausting and undermines the car's otherwise easygoing character.

The ADAS functions aren't particularly well resolved either. The lane keeping got confused by the glare of a low sun on a wet road and the overspeed warning bonged at me even below the limit. Thankfully, there's a row of proper buttons by your right knee to disable everything quickly and easily.

Overall, the hybrid Frontera doesn't really stand out in any one regard, but ride aside it's perfectly adequate for most drivers' daily duties and its pricing will turn many heads.

CHARLIE MARTIN

TECH SPEC

VAUXHALL FRONTERA HYBRID 1.2 145 DESIGN

Cheap family transport with a sensible, practical interior. Pricier than its Citroën sibling, though

★★★☆☆

Price £26,365
Engine 3 cyls in line, 1199cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 143bhp
Torque 170lb ft at 1750rpm
Gearbox 6-spd dual-clutch automatic, FWD
Kerb weight 1342kg
0-62mph 9.0sec
Top speed 118mph
Economy 54.3mpg
CO_2, tax band 118g/km, 29%
Rivals Dacia Duster, MG ZS, Skoda Kamiq

TESTER'S NOTE

On entry-level Design trim, there's a £400 option pack that adds a white roof and swaps the wheel covers for white steelies. As you can see, it does a good mini-Defender impression. **CM**

TESTER'S NOTE
Premium spec starts at £47,300 and adds the bigger battery, 20in wheels (versus 19s), a head-up display and a chintzy passenger touchscreen for its healthy premium. **SD**

TESTED 21.10.25, GLOUCESTERSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

SMART #5 PRO

Brand's largest car yet arrives here in entry-level single-motor spec

'Get the least powerful one.' My younger self would have baulked at such mature counsel and perhaps not recognised the person doling it out. But in the ever-widening world of electric SUVs, it's the advice du jour – the scintillating, five-star Hyundai Ioniq 5 N being the exception that proves the rule.

So it goes with the Smart #5. A 4.7m-long, 2.2-tonne SUV that could swallow the brand's pioneering late-1990s city car in its wheelbase (with room to spare) is already a leap into the absurd for us enthusiasts who have feverishly followed the automotive industry all our lives.

The fact our first drive was of the range-topping 637bhp Brabus model compounded the madness. We found it likeable amid the chaos, though, and a car with clear roots of something good that had blossomed in an unexpected direction.

Into the base model we go, then, as the #5 arrives on UK soil. Priced from a whisker under £40k (useful nowadays, and the only #5 to do so), the Pro hardly finds itself lacking in the power department. A sole motor delivers 335bhp to the rear axle for 0-62mph in 6.9sec, while a 74.4kWh battery offers up to 288 miles of range and 150kW rapid charging.

Perhaps more tempting is the 94kWh battery of the Pro+, which commands a further £4000 for its 366 miles and almighty 400kW top-ups (thanks to an 800V electrical architecture, versus 400V for the Pro). It gets a smidge more power and is 0.4sec quicker to 62mph too.

While the Pro is the baby of the #5 range, it's still a car with altogether too much power for its use case. It doesn't take much aggression to trigger its traction control out of a wet junction and thus bog the rear wheels down.

However, calmer inputs in its smoother modes reveal a car of relatively neat balance, and it's less shy about its rear-driven dynamics than any Volkswagen ID product.

It's blooming massive, of course, and you will be fighting against its lane keeping system on narrow back roads, ensuring the punch-drunk sensation of a Smart badge on something so unwieldy frequently bubbles to the surface.

It's no clumsier to drive than its multitudinous rivals, though, nor is its ride more turbulent, despite the obvious effort its damping must put in to keep its weight in check.

Its real charm lies inside, where Mercedes levels of class combine with typical Smart ebullience. Sure, there's far too much basic functionality within its touchscreen, but that afflicts most rivals too, and that the screen itself is integrated cleanly and of sharp clarity feels worthy of praise.

Rear leg room is admirable, coming good on that enormous wheelbase, and the rear nearside passenger can even whirr the front seat snug to the dashboard for the full chauffeuring experience.

Any cynicism about the boxy, unequivocally SUV shape on the outside is batted away by a usefully large cabin. Had Mercedes nabbed this car and badged it the next EQB, we would be praising a real uptick in charm and design chutzpah.

Not least when this is the mere entry-level model – though the one, as convention now dictates, that is the most recommendable of the lot.

STEPHEN DOBIE

This is a Merc-grade interior that stands out from its peers

#5 is too potent even when Brabus hasn't been involved

TECH SPEC

SMART #5 PRO

Afflicted by the same hefty weight and touchscreen bias as rivals, but this entry #5 charms its way above plenty of them in our estimations

★★★½☆

Price £39,800
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 335bhp
Torque 275lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, RWD
Kerb weight 2200kg
0-62mph 6.9sec
Top speed 124mph
Battery 76.0/74.4kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 288 miles, 3.4mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Kia EV5, Tesla Model Y, Volkswagen ID 4

ROAD TEST

AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5782

MG IM6

Having swept up sales in the bargain basement, MG is heading upmarket

MODEL TESTED
MG IM6 100 LONG RANGE
Price £47,995
Power 403bhp
Torque 369lb ft
0-60mph 5.5sec
30-70mph 4.0sec
Top speed 146mph (claimed)
70-0mph 46.3m (13deg C, damp)
Range 299/290/367 miles (average/touring/everyday)
Economy 3.1/3.0/3.8mpkWh (average/touring/everyday)
Weighted average charging rate 242kW

China's best-known automotive export brand, MG, is now unashamedly gunning for the UK car market's big fish.

Right now, our shores typically support between five and eight manufacturers with 5% market share or more. As 2025's year-to-date sales chart has it, none of Renault, Toyota, Land Rover, Hyundai, Mercedes-Benz, Nissan or Peugeot is among them. But MG clearly wants to be, and 20% more growth for the brand – not a figure beyond the bounds of credibility, given its performance to date – will do the trick.

It will be looking to the subject of this road test to get it part of the way there. The MG IM6 is one half of a two-pronged attack from its maker on the lower reaches of the market for premium electric cars. A 4.9m-long crossover, it is big for its class – notably longer than a Tesla Model Y or a Polestar 2 – and has a lower-roofed, fastback saloon sibling, the IM5, that could be considered an alternative to anything from a BMW i4 to a Volkswagen ID 7.

These are the first members of what, to European eyes, would appear to be a new sub-brand from MG – called IM, short for 'Intelligence in Motion' – that wants to become renowned for advanced, innovative, high-performing EVs of a particularly refined and 'elevated' kind.

Now to find out how much credibility MG can muster as it bids to lay hands on a whole range of new, stronger opponents.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★½☆

PROS High-end EV powertrain tech for mid-market money; four-wheel steering as standard; air suspension available
CONS Derivative looks give the lie to its premium positioning; it's heavy

If you're not quite sure what the MG IM6 reminds you of, that might be because it could be any one of a number of existing cars. The similarities with Tesla's outgoing design language at the front are clear, while there is an apparent tribute to the Aston Martin DBX in the car's tailgate. Among all of the things that this IM brand is set to represent, then, it seems original, distinctive looks don't feature.

You will look in vain to find one of MG's hexagon-shaped badges anywhere on the car. The reason is that, in its domestic market, this car isn't an MG at all. In China, Intelligence in Motion is a car brand in its own right, part-owned by the Chinese tech giant Alibaba Group, but, like MG, controlled by SAIC. That's why this car has a brand logo – which looks a little like morse code that's been written at a jaunty angle – all of its own.

IM5: MG has a premium saloon too

The IM6 shares its all-steel platform with the IM5 but doesn't offer that car's smaller, 73.5kWh drive battery. All IM6s use a nickel-manganese-cobalt pack of 96.5kWh usable capacity, and have an 800V electrical architecture that makes for very fast DC rapid charging of up to a claimed 396kW.

You can choose from a solitary drive motor on the rear axle or one per axle. The bottom-rung single-motor grade – the one we elected to test – is called the 100 Long Range (after its total battery capacity) and promises a WLTP-certified electric range of 388 miles: not quite class-leading, but close enough to be worth a lot of credit. It offers 403bhp and 369lb ft of torque – well clear of equivalent single-motor rivals – but for those who want even more, the dual-motor Performance version increases the car's reserves to a heady 742bhp and 592lb ft – and for a premium of only £3000.

Both versions ride on steel coil suspension and have conventional passive dampers, but go for a range-topping Launch Edition instead (still £9000 cheaper than a range-topping Tesla Model Y) and you will get a car with air springs and adaptive dampers into the bargain. Meanwhile, all versions get active all-wheel steering, which is supposed to enable some particularly innovative parking and manoeuvring aids, the effectiveness of which we will come to shortly.

Just as the 4.9m-long IM6 is big for its class (the average is 4.7m) and uses a big drive battery, so is the car heavy: 2340kg as we weighed it. That's probably fully 10% – or around 250kg – heavier than most of its rivals, and heavier still than one or two others.

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

PROS Lots of passenger space; classy materials and solid quality feel
CONS It's a deeply anonymous environment; boot space isn't quite like a full-size SUV

There is real, palpable quality to the cabin of the IM6, and plenty of space and airiness – though, like the exterior, there are few really distinguishing features and almost nothing in the way of design flair.

You sit at a slightly raised hip point, on big, comfortable, generously padded synthetic leather chairs up front. A full-length glass roof above you floods the cabin with light, and extends to meet a rearwards header rail punted behind the second-row headrests in order to extend head room for those in the back, à la Polestar 4. In this case, it does leave a small, rather pillar-box-like rear screen, which is much better than having no screen at all but not as desirable as having a normal-sized one. Visibility in general is otherwise fine, with plenty of camera technology on the outside of the car to supplement your view in myriad ways via the various digital displays.

■ Would an MG badge have helped sell a premium-priced car in the UK, or hindered one? Maybe MG decided the latter. This is the IM brand logo at any rate, and at the rear it doubles as the exterior boot release.

■ Wheels are either 20in or 21in in diameter, and have a particular 'aero' look that hides the brakes a bit. These, incidentally, are four-piston by-wire brakes up front, made by Continental – so nothing to be coy about.

Padded, soft-touch leather-effect trims cover most of the fascia, door cards and centre console, while satin-finish chrome is used on the air vents and window switchgear. But there are few other physical secondary controls to be found.

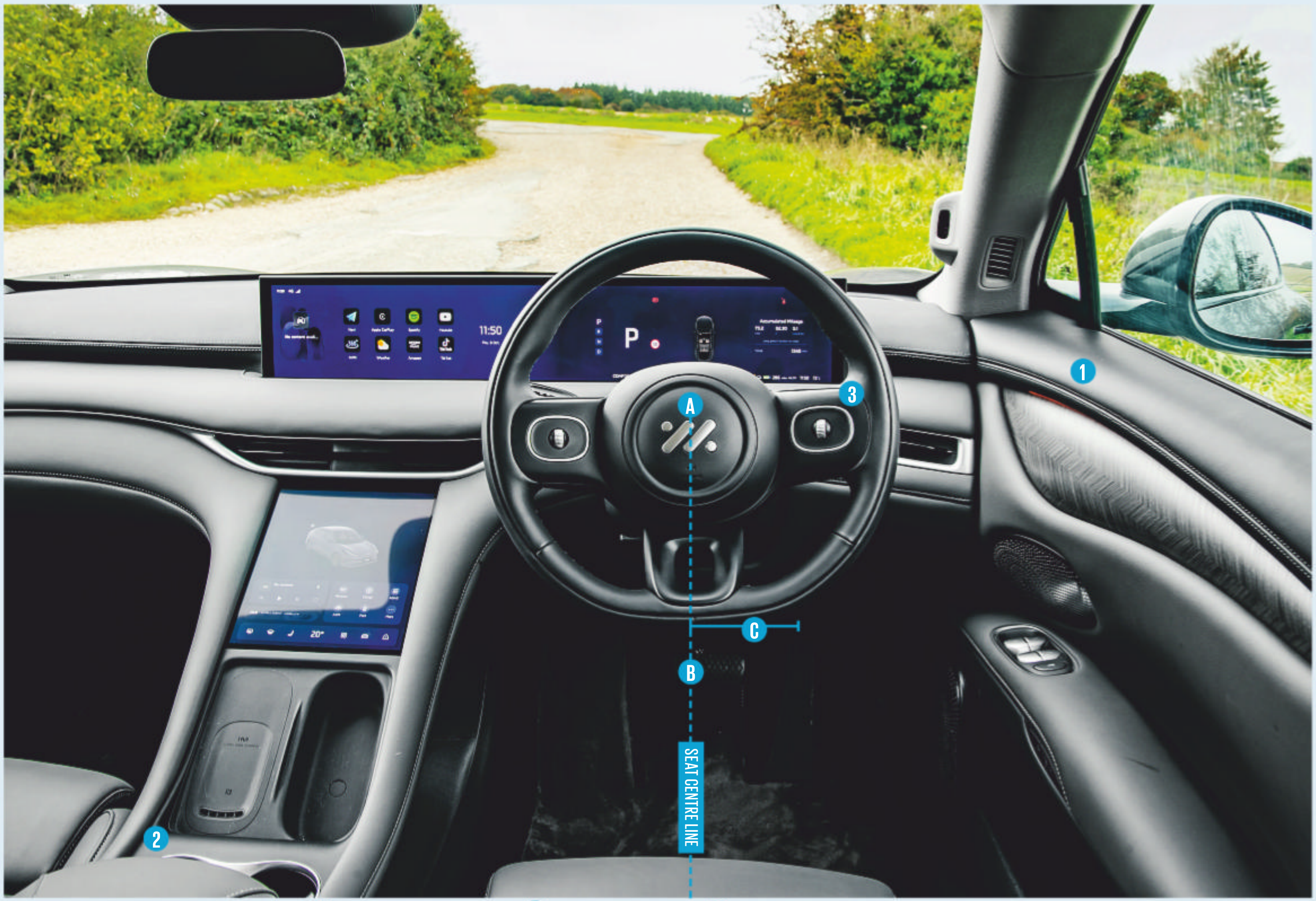
A widescreen instrument display-cum-navigation screen partners a landscape-oriented lower touchscreen console that stands in for physical buttons on the centre stack. The digital migration even extends to headlight controls and key seat adjustment functions you have to dive into that central screen to track down. Conventional wiper and indicator stalks are present and correct, mercifully, and the Tesla-style multifunction scroll wheels on the steering spokes actually cover quite a lot of ground, and prove useful once you're familiar with how to use them. Even so, the ▸

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

① Wood- and leather-effect trims lend the interior a convincing premium look and feel. The reflected ambient lighting features are likeably understated.

② Centre console looks quite bare, but for some cupholders, a retention cubby for your keys and a cooled smartphone charging pad. Wireless device integration is, in general, good.

③ Thumb scrollers on the steering spokes have various functions, but the important thing to remember is nudging the one on the right takes you directly to the ADAS deactivation screen.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 0mm Ⓒ Accelerator offset 145mm right. Manual column adjustment is a pleasant surprise, since any motorised one would probably require diving into the touchscreen. Pedals are well placed.

◂ car's top-level human-machine interface would be more intuitive if it were just a bit more old-fashioned.

Second-row occupant space is quite generous. We measured more head room than either a Tesla Model Y or a Kia EV6 offers, and notably more leg room and head room than in a Polestar 2. Boot space is similar, though the shape of the boot sides and roofline cut into the loading area a fair bit, and might prevent the bulkiest cargo from being carried.

MULTIMEDIA

★★★½☆

PROS Clever wireless smartphone mirroring integration; it's not the brightest, biggest or most overbearing system

CONS Insufficient physical controls, resulting in lots of layers to navigate; too many permissions to grant and QR codes to scan

MG claims a width of 26.3in for the IM6's upper digital screen. But this, of course, is a de facto side-by-side arrangement of instrument display and multimedia screen, and only ever displays one seamless image over its full width, an animation of a car surrounded by lots of dramatic faux tyre smoke, as you turn on the ignition (one tester rather aptly described as "a bit cringey").

The way the screen integrates wireless smartphone mirroring, leaving space for the mirrored display to move left and right by a few inches and make space for various camera feeds as you manoeuvre and turn, however, is quite clever. We also like the way the margins of the screen glow red to warn of a vehicle in your blindspot (after all, why use a light on a mirror that mostly doesn't show the vehicle in question?).

Typically you use the lower, portrait-oriented screen to select menus and functions for the upper one to display. Usability, while better than on the Cyberster convertible, is still a little convoluted but isn't the worst example of its kind.

The number of times you're asked to grant permission to share data with the cloud, however, or scan a QR code to download an app, gets decidedly annoying. We found no way to add a user account to the system to avoid this, and it significantly erodes the appeal of so much digital technology being in place at all.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★☆

PROS Plenty of punch for a single-motor EV; strong refinement; some regen control options

CONS No paddles to toggle regen braking

The IM6 doesn't rush into motion on a hair trigger, but instead pauses for the merest instant when you probe deep into the accelerator pedal, and then accelerates strongly but not dramatically, without breaching its grip levels or activating its electronics. It's assertive but collected and unruffled.

Having over 100bhp more than the equivalent Tesla Model Y (which we tested in matching Long Range Rear-Wheel Drive form earlier this year), you might expect the IM6 to beat it to 60mph by quite a distance. As it is, that mature, composed take-off sees to it that 60mph comes up in 5.5sec, 100mph in 12.2sec and 30-70mph in 4.0sec. In every respect, the Tesla is slower, though the IM6's advantage shows more strongly the quicker you go, and it feels quite a lot more commanding than some rivals at faster motorway speeds. A single-motor Kia EV6 needs fully 7.5sec longer to hit 100mph from rest, and is barely half as quick as the MG from 70-100mph.

That controlled, collected style of delivery ensures that it isn't outright briskness you notice about the IM6's performance but, instead, refinement. Despite its 20in alloy wheels, this car's cruising noise levels are remarkably low – especially on better, smoother surfaces. It has laminated side glazing front and rear, and uses noise-cancelling technology to lessen the impact of what frequencies you can pick up on. We measured cabin noise at 50mph at 59dBA (Tesla Model Y: 61dBA, Xpeng G6: 62dBA, Kia EV6: 65dBA).

Drivability is quite good, though it misses one or two useful EV conventions. The car has split paddle shifters on each side of the steering wheel but dedicates them to adjusting the car's piloted cruise control, when one or other could have been repurposed for manual control of brake regeneration when the cruise control is inactive. As it is, you have to find the right menu in the lower touchscreen to adjust trailing-throttle brake regen, and both unfettered coasting and one-pedal driving are offered either side of a mildish standard regen mode to which the car defaults.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★⯪☆

PROS Ride is settled and comfortable, mostly; handling is secure enough out of town; wieldy at manoeuvring speeds

CONS Feels big and heavy when carrying speed around corners; heavy, anodyne steering

The IM6's weight feels like something of an asset to it at times. As we have already seen, that powerful drive motor prevents it from making the car slow. Moreover, when the brake regen is turned off, the car becomes capable of carrying momentum remarkably far on a trailing throttle, and kicking up little road noise as it's doing so, which can be an enticing, effortless way to cover distance on quieter roads.

Until you arrive at a corner that little bit more quickly than you bargained on, that is. At that point, the IM6 makes its bulk apparent fairly plainly.

This is a big car that's medium-soft in its suspension tuning, and so it's quite smooth- and flat-riding in urban environments. It remains adequately well controlled in terms of body movement at speed, and certainly doesn't get involved with exaggerated body roll, vertical heave or pitch and dive.

But while the four-wheel steering disguises the IM6's size and weight at lower speeds, it doesn't seek to at cross-country pace, and so what used to feel quite a wieldy car suddenly seems rather large and cumbersome when sweeping into a quicker bend. The steering, compliant enough at lower speeds, becomes heavier and harder work at higher ones, and is never communicative or connected enough to be an invitation to engage. Its traction and stability control, while effective, are quite proactive and a little intrusive at the limit of grip.

In terms of outright ride sophistication, the car doesn't quite get into rarefied luxury territory – not on its steel coil springs, at least. There's a slight lack of wheel control apparent that allows the axles too much unchecked movement for that, and makes the ride on occasion a little thumpy and fussy over rougher roads. But, in the main, it's comfortable and isolated enough to serve the car, and its occupants, fairly well.

ASSISTED DRIVING

★★⯪☆☆

PROS Crab mode is novel, if not very useful; automatic parking aids all work as described

CONS Piloted cruise control is reactive and prone to dropping out

The IM6 has some interesting active manoeuvring features granted by its standard-fit four-wheel steering. Crab mode is accessed via the touchscreen, a bit like an automated parking system.

But, just as you're hoping it will somehow cause the wheels to rotate through 90deg like trolley castors, and the car to motor sideways into a kerbside space, you realise the limits of the system. It only permits 6deg of rear-axle steer in parallel with the front wheels. That means it's of some limited use to get closer to the kerb after a botched conventional parallel park, for example, but depends on space to move into either ahead of or behind the car to work acceptably well.

The IM6's piloted cruise control, with semi-autonomous lane keeping, is advertised as a particularly sophisticated system, but we found that it tended to over-react to traffic in adjacent lanes when regulating speed, and also struggled a little to maintain a central position in its lane. Even more annoyingly, it also drops out and needs to be re-engaged every time you change lanes, so we didn't use it often.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★★⯪

PROS Outstanding rapid-charging performance for the money; real-world range is strong; cheaper than key rivals – especially dual-motor models

CONS Outright weight means it's not too efficient

Considering its 800V rapid-charging performance especially, the IM6 looks like exceptional value for money at a sub-£50,000 entry price. Our test car recorded a 242kW weighted average in our habitual charging test, and on a 350kW charger at that when it's rated for a peak draw of 396kW. Only Porsche Taycans and Lotus EVs have done better.

The IM6's real-world electric range also strengthens its hand. Our car returned 3.0mpkWh in our touring efficiency test, which itself isn't brilliant but does still make for a motorway range of nearly 300 miles – an achievement few rivals could match. At lower cruising speeds and around town, you could expect more than 350 miles from it.

MG's buying offer is simple. Beyond the three derivative IM6 model tiers, you can pay to add metallic paint only. The bottom-rung Long Range car comes with heated outer rear seats, heated massage seats up front and a heat pump as standard. ▸

FRONT Leg room 1100mm, head room 1060mm. Slightly raised seats are very comfortable and have base angle and cushion length adjustment.

REAR Leg room 790mm, head room 980mm. Roof design allows for head room to beat most rivals, and a spacious feel, with reclining seatbacks.

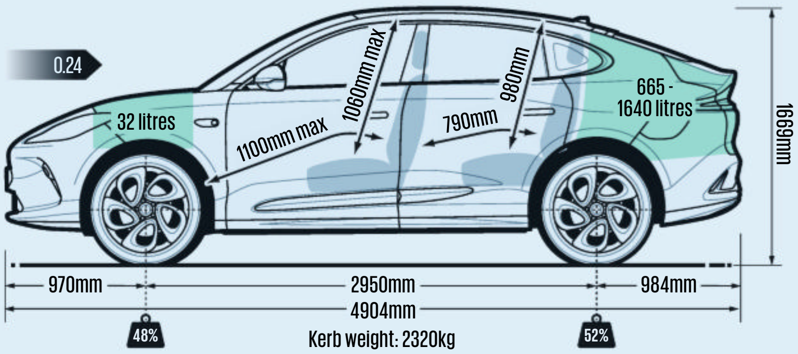
BOOT Length 1020-1960mm, width 870-1180mm, height 430-670-900mm. Pinched boot still has 665 litres to the roof. Our car didn't have a roller cover.

"It feels big and heavy when carrying speed around corners"

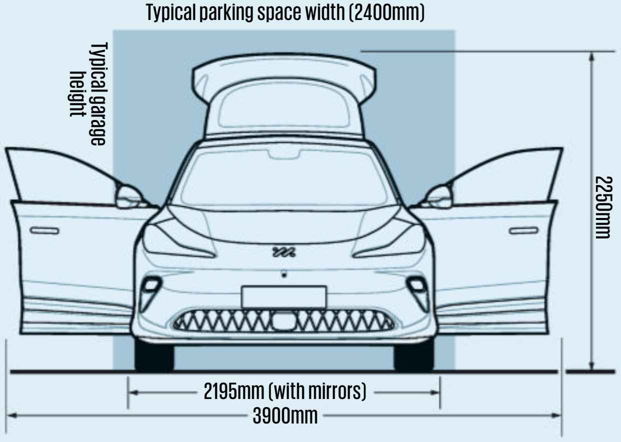
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

Length 4904mm **Width** 2195mm/1988mm (with/without mirrors) **Height** 1669mm **Door span** 3900mm **Max height to open bootlid** 2250mm


0.24
32 litres
1100mm max
1060mm max
790mm
980mm
665 - 1640 litres
1669mm
970mm
2950mm
984mm
4904mm
48%
52%
Kerb weight: 2320kg

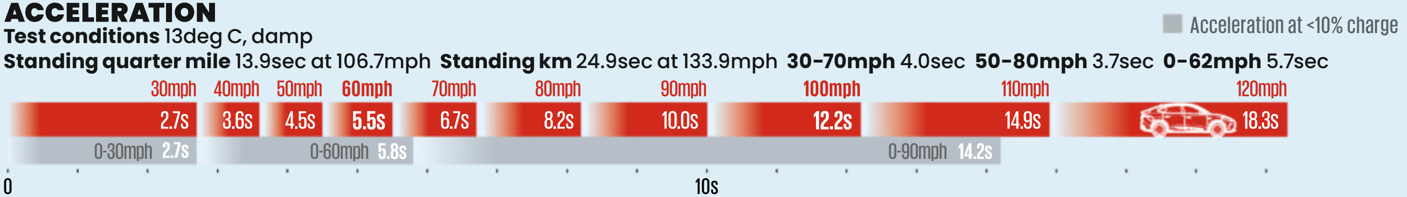
PARKING


Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
2250mm
2195mm (with mirrors)
3900mm

ACCELERATION

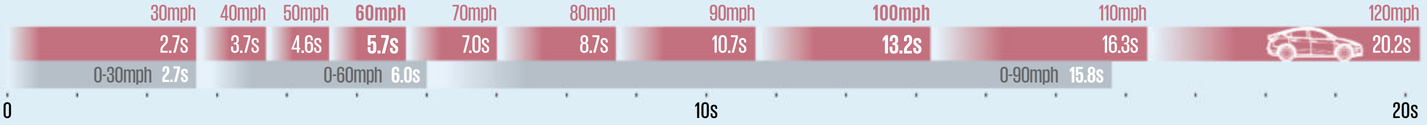
Test conditions 13deg C, damp

Standing quarter mile 13.9sec at 106.7mph **Standing km** 24.9sec at 133.9mph **30-70mph** 4.0sec **50-80mph** 3.7sec **0-62mph** 5.7sec



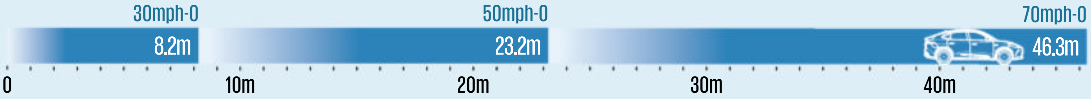
Tesla Model Y Long Range Rear-Wheel Drive (2025, 22deg C, dry)

Standing quarter mile 14.2sec at 103.6mph **Standing km** 25.5sec at 126.1mph **30-70mph** 4.3sec **50-80mph** 4.1sec

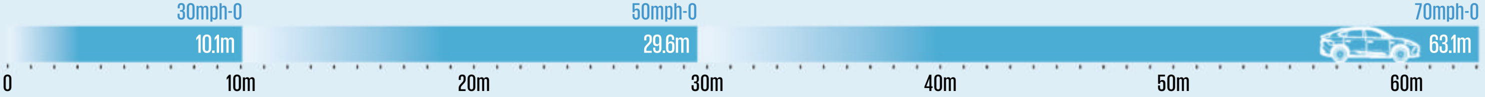


BRAKING

Dry 60-0mph 2.50sec



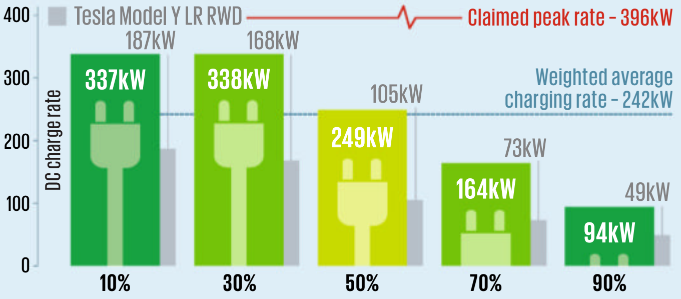
Wet 60-0mph 3.17sec



RAPID-CHARGING PERFORMANCE

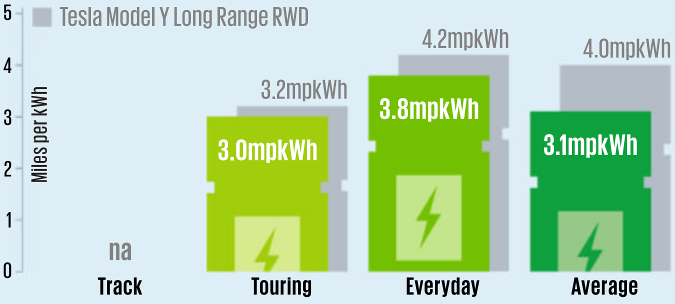
Charging port location Nearside rear wing

Charger used ABB Terra CE 360 CC, 350kW **AC charging** 11kW

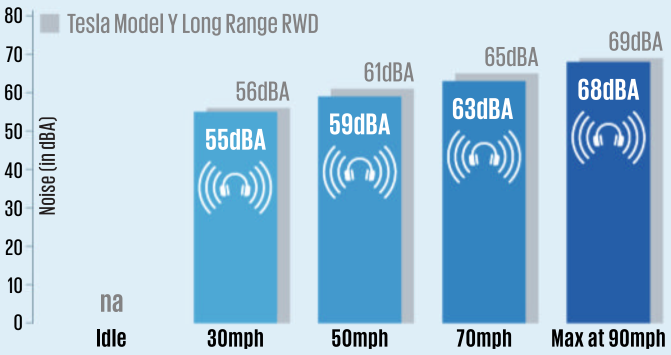


RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 388 miles, 3.4mpkWh (combined) **Test range** 299/290/367 miles (average/touring/everyday)

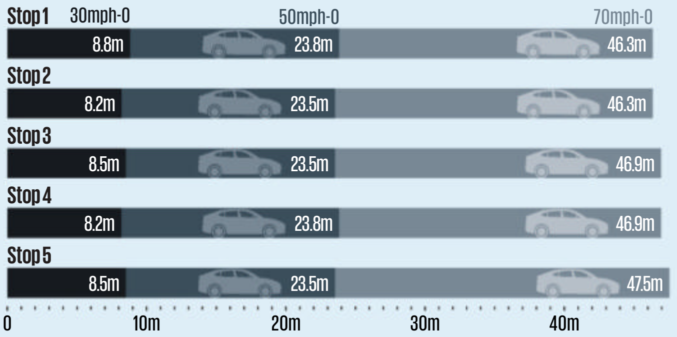


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: 1.2m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car, unless stated. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

MG IM6 100 LONG RANGE

On-the-road price £47,995
Price as tested £48,540
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £25,043
Contract hire £422 pcm (£2530 deposit + 36 months/30k miles, excluding VAT)
Typical PCP £459 pcm (£7482 deposit + 37 months/24,000 miles)
Insurance group 48

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard 20in alloy wheels, intelligent four-wheel steering, grey leather-effect seats, 12-way electric driver's seat with massager, LED headlights and rear lights, 360deg parking camera, front, side, curtain and central airbags, two-zone climate control, heat pump, 10.5in touchscreen infotainment, 20-speaker audio
Optional Rembrandt Grey metallic paint £545

MOTOR & BATTERY

Installation Rear, transverse, RWD
Type Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 403bhp
Torque 369lb ft
Maximum regen capacity 53kW
Battery type NMC
Capacity 100.0/96.5kWh (total/usable)
Voltage 751V
Power to weight 174bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 159lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 1-spd reduction gear
Reduction/final drive ratio 10.2:1
mph per 1000rpm 8.5
Motor rpm at 70/80mph 8268/9449

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel unitary chassis
Weight/as tested 2320kg/2340kg
Weight distribution (f/r) 48%/52%
Drag coefficient 0.24
Wheels 8.0Jx20in (f), 9.0Jx20in (r)
Tyres 235/50 R20 104V (f), 255/45 R20 105V (r), Pirelli Scorpion Elect
Spare None (mobility foam)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front Double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Rear Multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Steering EPAS, rack and pinion, active 4WS; 2.7 turns lock to lock; 10.2m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 365mm ventilated discs, four-piston calipers
Rear 365mm ventilated discs, four-piston calipers
Handbrake type Electronic, automatic

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO$_2$ 0g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £24/£48

VERDICT

The exceptional mixed with the bland and irritating

★★★⯪☆

Automotive history repeats itself time and again. The 'premium' cars that tend to hit the big time are those with a real breadth to their CVs – that do a range of things well, rather than one thing brilliantly.

It will take time, clearly, for a brand like MG to be capable of such completeness. The IM6 is already a lot of electric car for the money, with an advanced powertrain that its rivals currently have no answer for. It's spacious, refined, manoeuvrable, and quite lavish in its quiet, anonymous way.

But while that positioning tends to sell budget propositions well, it's unlikely to motivate premium-brand regulars as effectively. They will see what this car lacks – true personality, distinguishing design, dynamic finesse and detailed systems fine-tuning – as plainly as what it offers. Although what it offers on the spec sheet speaks for itself.

TESTERS' NOTES

MATT SAUNDERS
A pair of feeds from the backwards-facing cameras automatically pop up on the widescreen infotainment display during an emergency stop.

RICHARD LANE
I can understand people gravitating towards the Long Range version, but the IM6 Performance is a family-friendly EV with premium-brand trappings, 742bhp and 0-62mph in just 3.5sec. And it's cheaper than a 2.0-litre diesel BMW X3. Surely it sells itself?

FACELIFT FIXES

- Find some more distinctiveness and identity in both exterior and interior design.
- Making air suspension standard across the range would be another great selling point.
- Or at least find other ways to create a really distinguished ride.

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3	4	5	
			MG IM6 100 LONG RANGE			
	POLESTAR 2 LONG RANGE SINGLE MOTOR Still the good-looking, good-to-drive, standout usable premium EV.	**SKODA ENYAQ EDITION 85** The sensible option. Lots of space, all the range and pace you need, and a sensible price.		**TESLA MODEL Y LONG RANGE RWD** More refined than it was and still super-practical. MG is longer-legged and charges faster.	**KIA EV6 84KWH GT-LINE** Sharp-looking and good to drive, but now below par objectively in terms of range and pace.	**BYD SEALION 7 COMFORT** We have only driven dual-motor cars so far, but a full test of the single-motor model is on the way.
	★★★★☆	★★★★☆		★★★⯪☆	★★★☆☆	
Price	£49,160	£44,310		£48,890	£48,585	£47,000
Power, torque	295bhp, 361lb ft	282bhp, 402lb ft		295bhp, 302lb ft	225bhp, 258lb ft	309bhp, 280lb ft
0-62mph, top speed	5.9sec, 127mph	6.7sec, 111mph		5.6sec, 125mph	7.7sec, 115mph	6.7sec, 133mph
Range, economy	379 miles, 3.9mpkWh	359 miles, 4.1mpkWh		387 miles, 4.4mpkWh	361 miles, 3.9mpkWh	300 miles, 3.1mpkWh

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Autocar
The Autocar
WHAT REALLY MATTERED IN 2018
AUTOCAR
ROAD TEST YEARBOOK
AUDI'S TESLA
BMW's shock supercar
The Autocar
Entirely New Anglia
Autocar
DURON BRAKE LININGS
CAR & GENERAL INSURANCE CORPORATION LTD
Autocar
Christmas Gifts
Round the World by Motor Caravan
MORRIS
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More power and pace
Motor that works
more manual
Why this is the new Fiesta
secret Porsche rival
The crazy supercar that's 3D-printed
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1978 Renault
Week ending 4 NOVEMBER 1978

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RICHARD LANE

Testing, testing

De Simone (left) leads a team of 400 test drivers at Ferrari

So you want to be a Ferrari test driver, eh? The good news, says the man who would be making this irresistible job offer, is that you have longer than you perhaps thought: Raffaele de Simone's recruiting cut-off is 40 years old. But note that it could then take you a decade to join the programme for something serious like the 296 Speciale (see p24).

Ferrari's chief test driver since 2014, who I was lucky enough to have dinner with on the Speciale launch, started earlier than most. He was just 19 and still an engineering student when he joined Dario Benuzzi's team. His first project? The Enzo.

I know – hard to believe. However, events were put in motion during a race weekend at Misano. It was the first semi-public outing for an Enzo prototype, with Benuzzi at the wheel and Piero Ferrari riding shotgun. Benuzzi, if you need reminding, had signed off the dynamics of every Ferrari since the Dino and is still Maranello's most celebrated test driver (although, given the recent run of stellar models, de Simone is certain to inherit that status). This was back in 2001. De Simone was sitting on the grid, transfixed by this wild pre-Enzo through his visor when he should have been zoning in for a race start. It was a powerful moment that left "a permanent image".

Later that day, de Simone managed to take down Benuzzi's phone number while both their cars were stuck in traffic leaving the circuit. Talk about sliding doors. Then came an interview and the offer of a full-time salary, although Ferrari would also allow him time to finish his degree. All he needed to do was give up on a career in top-tier GT racing. Not an easy decision, especially when the sponsorship was in place, but the opportunity at Ferrari was too sweet.

> **"It's fairly unlikely that any teenagers worked on the F80"**

I ask about the master Benuzzi's driving style: "Careful. He had probably scared himself many times driving the Daytona or cars like this that were not braking well. Plenty of margin before the limit. He was not a fast driver, but you don't need to force the pace to understand the car."

De Simone doesn't so much as imply it, but it's clear Benuzzi and Amedeo Felisa saw something rare in his blend of engineering mind, racer's synapses and the crucial love of driving. He dispassionately says he is just one part of a testing ecosystem that is now 400 people strong: "I represent the role of head of test drivers. If it were not me, it would be another, but with the same scheme of applying the company's logics."

While Ferrari still signs up talent before graduation, it's unlikely any teenagers worked on the F80. The path to developing begins with testing, usually for nine years. The difference? Development drivers work with prototypes while testers shake down completed customer cars. The latter is a 'pure driving' job, where you test everything from water ingress to ADAS tuning and ensure the car stops in a straight line and corners symmetrically. To even stand a chance of moving into development, you must also be able to quickly discern between, say, two identical 12Cilindri models that have rolled off the line, based on production discrepancies and the tolerance variations in supplied parts. How long to develop that feel? Three years.

Not crashing is also a good idea. It can be very upsetting for the client. Although, based on 2024's production of 13,700 cars and 40 minutes of shakedown for each, accidents are inevitable.

But if you're talented and don't crash much, the door to development is open. In the earliest assessments, de Simone overloads the budding developer with information at Fiorano to see how they cope. They must adapt fast, changing driving style and remembering commands. And they must enjoy it, as "we sell fun, not only cars".

You then move into durability, where you're introduced to prototypes approved by more senior staff. It's tough work: instead of 40 minutes in a lavish, finished car, you spend seven hours in a far more complex environment, where you need "to speak with her, to learn her", knowing the timbre of a squeak that leads to a failure.

And again, don't crash. The Speciale prototypes cost around €2 million each, and for durability the stakes are higher still: "If you're at 200,000km and you break the car, you're interrupting a very long test, so it's €2m plus the time and the kilometres spent, and you will never know when [for example] the gearbox would have broken. It's a big responsibility."

So it's a long road to the top, but the brightest sparks might one day have the chance to attempt that special, abstract and very difficult thing. Which is what, Raffa? "To put art in the car."

TIME TRAVELLER

But this is no TT from the future, insists Audi's CEO, who joins JAMES ATTWOOD for a drive in the radical Concept C prototype

The first time Audi boss Gernot Döllner drove the Concept C was for about 30 metres onto a stage in Milan for the pivotal prototype's unveiling in September. The second time, it turns out, is today, on a bright but fresh morning high in the Italian Dolomites – and I'm along for the ride.

Given this will be his first time driving the radical concept car that previews the Ingolstadt firm's future on public roads, Döllner is sporting a predictably bright grin as he settles into the driver's seat. "This will be a fun day at work," he says. It's a pretty surreal one too. Surrounding the Concept C in which we're now sitting is an incredible four-ringed guard of honour formed of the machines that inspired it: the first-generation TT, an original R8 V8 coupé, an RS4 saloon and, best of all, an immaculate 1936 Auto Union Type C grand prix racer.

There will be time to admire Audi's glorious past later. First it's time for an exclusive taste of the firm's future – both from the passenger seat alongside Döllner and then behind the wheel. Yeah, this really should be a fun day at work…

A CONCEPT LIKE NO OTHER

The Concept C is the manifestation of the efforts by Döllner to reshape Audi since he took over as CEO in September 2023. Most eye-catchingly, it showcases the new, streamlined design language introduced by chief creative officer Massimo Frascella, who joined Audi from JLR last year as one of Döllner's first key hires.

The new design language is centred on 'clarity' and making Audi 'distinctive' again. There is a new 'grille', inspired by the one on the Type C, and a focus on minimalism and simplicity. In Audi's Ingolstadt design studio work is already under way to roll out that new design language on all new models from 2027 onwards.

But the Concept C is more than just a design study: it previews a new electric two-seat sports coupé intended to fill the gap in Audi's line-up left by the TT and R8, both of which went out of production over the past two years.

As he carefully steers the Concept C out onto the public roads, Döllner reveals conceptual work on the new model – known as the C Sport within Audi – had begun before Frascella started in June 2024. In fact, the idea arose within Döllner's first six months of the job in 2023: "When you come up with a new strategy and want to change things in a company, it's always easier to do it with a car, to show people that it's worth fighting for that change."

Audi previewed its new sports car and design language in Milan

Döllner wanted to show a prototype model at this year's Munich motor show, so "Massimo started developing his new design philosophy and developed it in parallel with this car. It happened quite fast."

The development of the Concept C was done alongside work on the production model. But Döllner was adamant this should be more than a normal show car, which are often put together by third-party firms using a generic platform. The Concept C was built in-house at Ingolstadt, by a team of around 150 people.

At the Milan unveiling, the machine was described as drivable; that turns out to be quite the understatement. Döllner says "this is a real car, just made with single tooling". He pushed for a true working prototype because while "it's really complex, the result is so much more realistic and really helps with the feasibility of the production car. We would have missed an opportunity not to make it truly drivable."

And it truly is drivable: as the numberplates hint, it's road-legal, Audi's concept team having been able to secure the necessary type approval to register it as a prototype. "To be honest, the team surprised me with that," admits Döllner. "I didn't know they would really bring it that far."

As a result, the Concept C has full suspension, windscreen wipers, indicators, seatbelts and another feature that comes to light when a bus unexpectedly pulls out at a junction and prompts the car ahead of us to engage reverse a little too eagerly. Worried (without cause, thankfully) that his one-off concept is about to be backed into, Döllner hits the centre of the steering wheel to let out a loud beep. "I didn't know the horn works," he laughs. "That's good to know."

INSIDE THE CONCEPT C

We are soon into quiet winding mountain roads, giving Döllner the opportunity to showcase the Concept C's potential. That said, the tight nature of the roads and Italian speed limits mean ▸

Gernot Döllner says Audi has yet to settle on a name for the production version of the Concept C, but confirms it will be a new nameplate: "It's not a TT, definitely not. And it's not an R8. We're thinking about how to name it, which is always difficult."

Despite the exotic look, it will make production largely unaltered in 2027

◂ we rarely exceed 55mph, below the concept's claimed limited top speed of 90mph.

That top speed figure is about the only technical detail Audi will confirm: Döllner won't be drawn on power output, acceleration, battery size or range. He also won't reveal if the Concept C uses a bespoke prototype platform or a version of the new sports car architecture that will underpin the 2027 production model along with sister firm Porsche's electric 718 Boxster and Cayman, which have already been spied testing on public roads.

That said, he does confirm that the batteries in the concept are stacked up behind the driver, in the place that a combustion engine would sit in a traditional mid-engined sports car. That's a major departure from most 'skateboard' EV platforms that house the batteries under the floor of the car and suggests that concept may well be based on that future production platform.

That battery placement allows the car to sit much lower to the ground than most EVs. "The centre-oriented battery is very good for weight distribution," says Döllner. "The centre of gravity is much lower and is perfect, and it's also really good for centring the inertial torque, so it makes the car very agile."

Another major focus of the Concept C's development was on lowering weight, which remains the biggest challenge in making performance EVs handle like combustion cars. The frame and bodywork make extensive use of aluminium (something reflected in interior styling elements and the matt aluminium paint), while Audi chose to make the concept model rear-wheel drive with a single motor mounted on the back axle. Döllner says that it offers around the same power as the eventual entry-level version of the production model will.

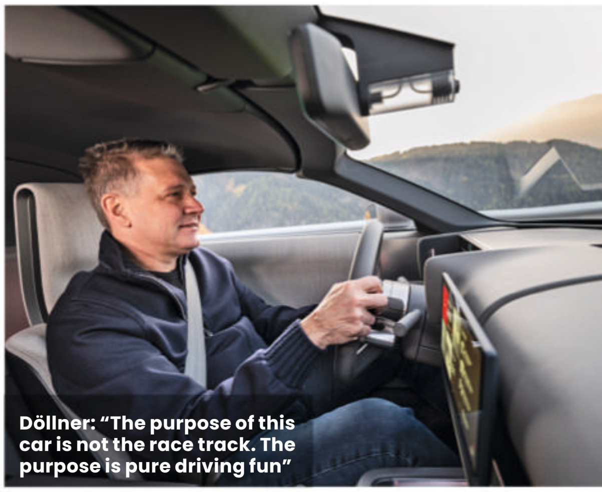
Given Audi's heritage, dual-motor all-wheel-drive Quattro versions will come. Döllner says: "Quattro is at the core of Audi, but we're moving from a front-wheel-drive to a rear-wheel-drive company, because with EVs the reason for front-wheel drive is gone."

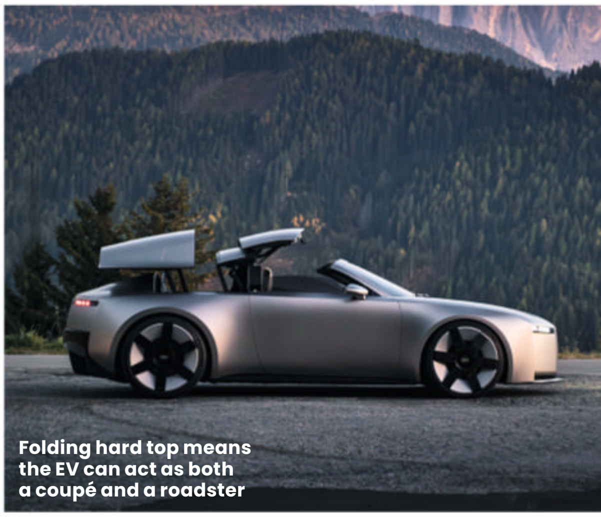
How much power the Concept C has is impossible to gauge from the passenger seat, but as Döllner chucks it enthusiastically into a series of winding hairpin turns, I can feel the agility and litheness of the chassis. There's a balance to it, and clearly plenty of grip. "It's very light, very agile," says Döllner. You wouldn't expect the boss of Audi to say anything else, but the enthusiasm with which he attacks the corners ahead of us gives credence to his words.

As we wind up the hill, the peaceful Italian countryside is complemented by the understated whirr of the electric motor. "It's a natural motor sound with a bit of enhancement," says Döllner. He does confirm the production version will offer optional synchronised engine sounds, along with a 'virtual' gearbox controlled by paddles on the steering wheel.

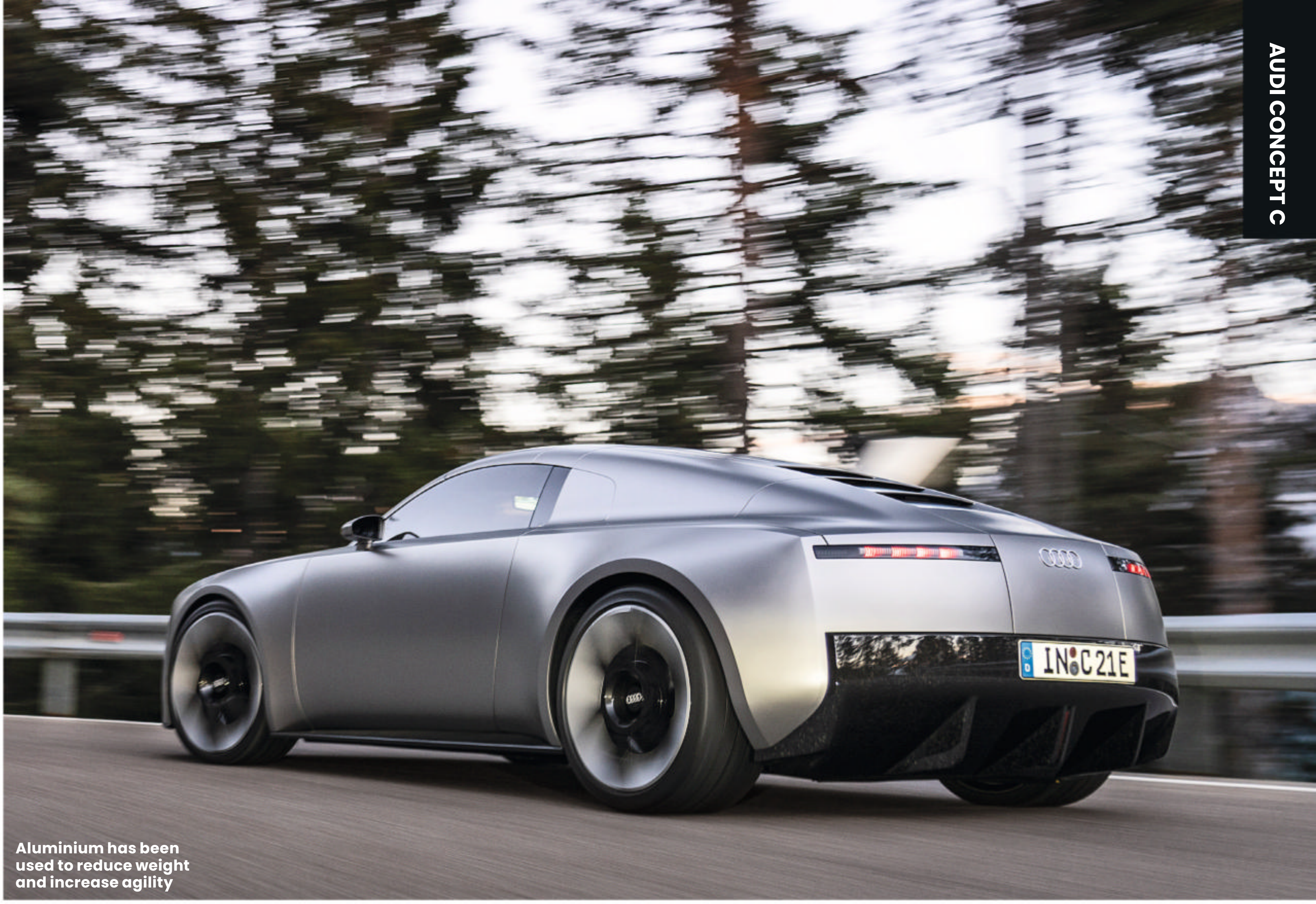
That approach, pioneered by the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N, is being adopted by other firms as a way of giving aural feedback to keen drivers, and it's something Döllner has changed his mind about. "For the first three or four years with EVs, my belief was it has to be silent," he says. "But then we had our first prototypes with a virtual gearbox, and I found it really helps to get feedback from the car and emotionalises the whole story."

Döllner says drivers will be able to switch the artificial noise off. It's "so you can have both the silent car for cruising and a more sporty one". "The purpose of this car is not the race track," he says, before gesturing towards the scenery. "The purpose is exactly what we're doing today. It's pure driving fun." ▸


Döllner: "The purpose of this car is not the race track. The purpose is pure driving fun"


Folding hard top means the EV can act as both a coupé and a roadster

"The new sports coupé is intended to fill the gap in Audi's line-up left by the TT and R8"



Aluminium has been used to reduce weight and increase agility

MK4 TT IN ALL BUT NAME?

When the Audi Concept C was unveiled, much was made of the similarities between it and the TT. But the R8 was also an inspiration, and seeing the three machines parked up next to each other shows how the concept draws from both. And quick refresher drives in both predecessors showcased the different ways they inspire.

The Mk1 TT is a study in purity: the Bauhaus-inspired design meant simple, curving bodywork and a pared-back, demure interior. There's a restraint to the design that links straight to the Concept C.

But it's the R8 V8 that bears the most resemblance to the Concept C in terms of vehicle dynamics. It shines on winding mountain roads, with its 4.2-litre V8 engine offering ample power for the light chassis. When you turn in to a corner, you really feel the benefit of that mid-engined layout, with the rearward centre of mass making it enticingly easy to attack corners. It shows why Audi and Porsche are so focused on their 'battery pack' concept for an EV sports car chassis.

Where the R8 also scores, of course, is aural pleasure: that V8 sounds glorious under throttle. If Audi is going to include artificial engine noise for the Concept C, it could do worse than just sample the V8...

Driver sits in front of the battery stack, as if in a mid-engined sports car

LETTING THE TOP DOWN

At the turning point of our route we pause for some photos, the early morning light glinting off the matt paint of the Concept C. Döllner says he was "really happy" with the response to the car when shown in Milan and Munich, adding that "when people have seen it, they understand it really fits our brand fully". Still, there's a big difference between seeing the car on a stand and in nature. "It's really special to see this for the first time here," says Döllner.

But our schedule is tight, so there's little time to truly savour the views. Instead, we have to lower the roof, which our photographer insists will make for better pictures on the return journey. It's also a chance to experience one of the car's signature features: this is the first Audi with a folding hard top. "We didn't want to do two cars, a coupé and a roadster," says Döllner. "So this was part of the brief. But it has evolved, and we developed this special roof concept that became part of the design. It's perfect for this sort of car."

While it's unlikely to be a massive volume seller, the Concept C will pave the way for the refreshed design language to be introduced across the rest of the firm's line-up. Given the car's wildly futuristic looks, it's hard not to picture how incongruous it will appear in a dealership plonked next to Audi's existing models. Döllner admits the "transition" will be a "difficult moment to handle" but one that's worth it, given the ultimate goal.

Much as there's still so much to ask Döllner about the future, that will have to wait: we're back at the event base, so it's time for Audi's CEO to jump out and for me to take the wheel.

DRIVING THE CONCEPT C

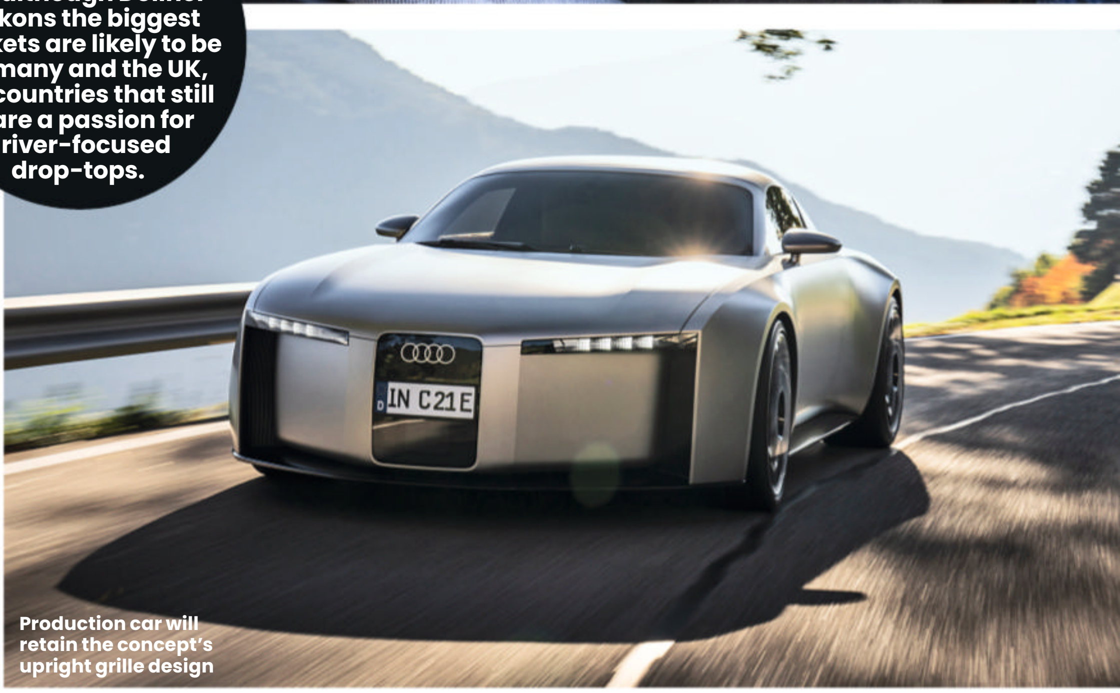
The Concept C may be road-legal, but because it's a prototype, only qualified engineers – such as Döllner, whose background is in vehicle development – are allowed to drive it on public roads. I am, you won't be surprised to learn, not a qualified Audi engineer, so my run is restricted to a short stretch of closed road.

That section is far slower and twistier than the roads Döllner was traversing, and the presence ahead of me of a camera car keeps my speeds in check. But it is enough to give a tantalising taste of the concept's potential.

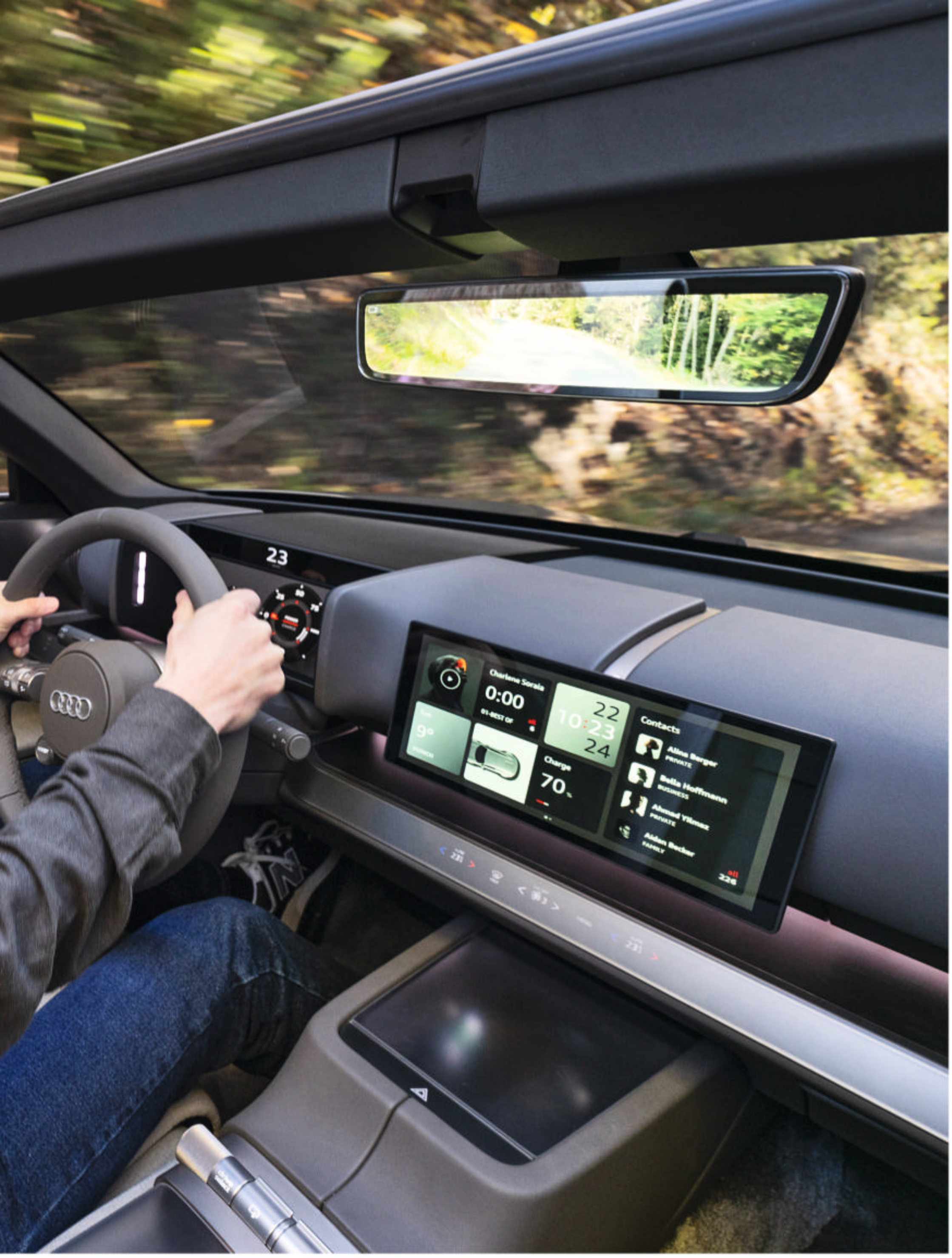
Settling into the driver's seat, I'm struck by the simplicity of the interior layout. There's

> *"The Concept C feels a bit special, with a real sense of occasion"*

The Concept C will be a global car, although Döllner reckons the biggest markets are likely to be Germany and the UK, two countries that still share a passion for driver-focused drop-tops.



Production car will retain the concept's upright grille design



ANOTHER NEW AUDI

The Audi Concept C isn't a pure performance car, but adding a sports coupé to its line-up is one aspect of how the Ingolstadt firm is ramping up that angle of its heritage.

Gernot Döllner talks of some "interesting RS cars" that will be launched in the next two years, as Audi aims to build on the attention hopefully created by its Formula 1 entry next season. Just as Döllner's views on artificial engine noise have changed, so too has his stance on F1: in his previous VW Group role, he questioned the decision to enter F1, but he says that was because the original plans were for both Porsche and Audi to enter, which he felt made no sense. Now, as Audi's CEO, he's fully on board.

"When I joined the brand, I really learned about the importance of motorsport for Audi and some of the success we've had in motorsport," he says. "It's really exciting, but it's also a huge challenge.

"The next two years will be about building up the team. We have two years to develop that team and then hopefully we have a five-year horizon to be able to compete and drive for championships."

Audi will race in F1 for the first time next season

a large, round steering wheel, behind which there's a small driving information display, with the speedometer housed just above that, closer to my eyeline. Then there's a small central touchscreen, which can be folded away when not needed, with a small number of haptic controls built into the dash. Most of the key controls are on stalks on the steering column.

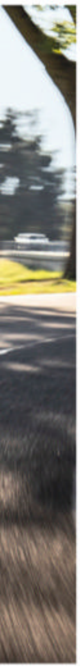
The seats are low to the ground but cosseting and comfortable, and the driving position is purposeful. Visibility is decent with roof up or down, with a digital rear-view mirror helping make up for the lack of rear visibility caused by the battery layout.

Given this is a true one-off, I keep things easy. Still, pick-up is good, with the electric motor nicely responsive to throttle inputs. It's well modulated too, with none of the surge you get from some performance EVs.

The steering is weighty, which gives the car a good feel when cornering. The suspension copes well with the lumps and bumps in the road, although the low ride height and seating position mean you do feel undulations more than in some cars. Still, that's part of the joy of a low-slung sports car – and even in prototype form the Concept C feels really quite refined.

It also feels a bit special, with a real sense of occasion. The engineer who is accompanying me on my drive mentions that he's meeting with the team working on the production car next week to pass on development learnings from the concept, and it's exciting to think what the finished version could be like.

As I climb out of the Concept C for the last time, the potential is clear: both for the car and what it can do for Audi as a brand. A fun day at work, then – and the prospect of more fun days to come as we count down to 2027. 🅰



Inspiration came from cars including the 1936 Auto Union Type C racer

Six-spoke wheels hark back to the 1991 Avus Quattro concept

Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

Bin there, done that

UK success story Dennis Eagle has seen it all. **FELIX PAGE** tours its HQ

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

“Whenever we say to people we work at Dennis Eagle, they say: ‘Dennis? Oh, the fire engines.’”

As reputations go, you could do worse than be associated with producing emergency response vehicles, but if you haven’t actually had anything to do with them for more than two decades, and have since become a market leader in quite another area, the misconception is probably a bit frustrating.

“It wasn’t us that manufactured the fire engine. We manufactured the cabin at our plant in Blackpool, yes, but it was in 2004 they stopped manufacturing it,” explains the company’s managing director, Keith Day. “We’ve got thousands of these driving around the streets now that seem to be invisible,” he says, gesturing out of the window of the firm’s Warwickshire factory at the ranks of gleaming new bin lorries awaiting delivery to their new owners.

Dennis Eagle, like all the very best automotive-adjacent institutions (cough), was started in 1895, originally as Dennis Brothers, a maker of lawnmowers and bikes that later branched out into building chassis for a wide range of commercial vehicles, including – you guessed it – fire engines. Today’s company was formed in the mid-1980s when Dennis merged with vehicle body manufacturer Eagle Engineering and opened a factory in Leamington Spa, which over the past four decades has grown to become one of the country’s most important vehicle plants.

The site currently produces roughly 32 lorries a week of various shapes and sizes – mostly derivatives of Dennis Eagle’s own Elite and electric eCollect models, but the firm is more than happy to plop one of its bodies on the back of a chassis cab from Mercedes, Volvo or Scania, some of its biggest rivals in the sector. The company builds almost everything in the UK, where it employs more than 1000 people – and the domestic market is its biggest, accounting for around 80% of its total output.

This thriving operation is an unusually reassuring indication of the health of UK industry and Day thinks the firm’s commitment to local manufacturing is a key ingredient of its success. “We’re very UK-centric from a customer point of view – and people buy from people,” he

Dennis Eagle currently makes about 32 lorries of varying types a week

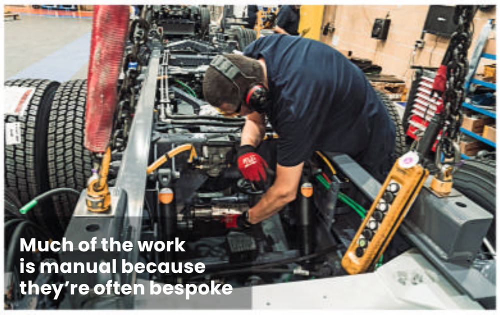
DENNIS
VX75 SFO

tells us, having taken a quick break from giving a factory tour to a gaggle of representatives from one of London's biggest boroughs.

"It really helps when you can bring customers on to the manufacturing site and show them around: they can meet the people and that helps to establish that relationship with customers," he says. Certainly, our own access-all-areas tour of the facility is exciting enough to instil in me a new-found sense of appreciation and admiration for these 'invisible' heroes of UK infrastructure.

Page finds the pre-delivery testing wheelie good fun

"We've got to understand what our niche is and really focus on that"



Much of the work is manual because they're often bespoke

MD Day: "We're very UK-centric. People buy from people"

Our first stop is the chassis assembly hall, where 50 workers zip nimbly between the rails of limo-length ladder frames, routing brake systems, nipping up fuel lines, connecting up driveshafts and finally sliding the whole assembly underneath a cab – all mostly by hand. Even at this early stage, it's plain to see just how much variation there is between each order: there are standard-length chassis with three axles and shorter twin-axle variants for the world's tightest city streets; some frames are black while others are 'Veolia grey'; and some even have entirely bespoke suspension and tyre specs. "We had a really interesting one that we built up for collecting refuse on a beach. It looked like a monster truck," recalls sales and marketing boss Lee Rowland.

He says part of the reason that the assembly procedure remains so "incredibly manual", even as the trucks themselves become increasingly complex and automated, is that it affords Dennis Eagle the flexibility it needs to cater to the wildly different needs of its customers. "No two councils collect waste the same way, so no two contracts for trucks are the same. They all have very slight differences and variations and we've always been very, very good at accommodating it," says Rowland.

"That customer focus side is quite important. It's necessary for the market," he adds.

The ethos of flexibility carries over into building two, where hulking bodyshells – some the size of small bungalows, at 27,000 litres – are being noisily, smokily bent and welded into shape, ready to be filled with all manner of intimidating-looking mechanisms for separating, crushing and unloading rubbish. After that, it's on to one of the gargantuan paint booths to be decorated in the chosen livery of their buyers (split roughly 50:50 between councils and private contractors) and, finally, the finished articles are parked up for a rigorous round of pre-delivery testing and evaluation.

It's a fascinating and precise production process that has been honed over decades, seemingly to the point of perfection, and it's only set to get busier – with plans to start increasing output of chassis and body components from early next year and capacity beyond that to add a whole second shift if it's ever needed.

Of all the different strands of the automotive industry, surely this must be one of the more 'future-proof', I posit to Day, given society's ceaseless propensity to generate ever-greater mounds of waste. "There's always going to be a requirement for it," he agrees, adding that there's plenty of scope for development, too, to explore new and more efficient ways of collecting, separating, sorting and disposing of all the different types of rubbish.

Crucially, though, even as Dennis Eagle eyes a future of stable growth, it won't stray far from what it does best.

"The vision statement is 'innovative refuse collection vehicles for safer, cleaner communities' – and that's our niche. We've got to understand what our niche is and really focus on that," says Day. "The danger is that if you try to move away from that, you get distracted and you can end up spending a lot of money on something that's not going to be cheaper."

The outlook, then, is totally rubbish – and Dennis Eagle couldn't be happier about it.

SO WHAT'S IT LIKE TO DRIVE?

"If you can drive a car, you can drive one of these," says Tony Darby, dispatch co-ordinator for Dennis Eagle's pre-delivery inspection team, as he pivots a brand-spankers Elite+ deftly around a tightly packed Warwick housing estate.

Fresh from the production line, this six-wheeler is just a few days from entering service with Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council and it's a stark demonstration of just how far bin lorries have come since the early days. USB ports, massive cupholders, Bluetooth surround-sound audio, iPad mounts, ambient lighting – we've got all the mod cons of the average premium SUV in here and it certainly doesn't feel all that different from a modern car in its manoeuvrability and pace.

"Oh, they've got some speed on them," says Darby as he winds up the 7.7-litre Volvo diesel engine for a stretch of dual carriageway and we surge effortlessly from 30-50mph. Minutes later, the Elite impresses again when we reach the end of a cul-de-sac and Darby spins it around about as quickly and easily as if he was driving a Ford Fiesta. Next time you're whining about being woken up when the bins are collected at 6am, remember: those are among the UK's best drivers and most amazing machines out there.

Keep it in the family

McLaren has been rewarding customers with some very special track-day events. Circuit virgin **WILL RIMELL** was invited too

You dream about the chance to live out your racing driver fantasies, and mine is about to be realised. The venue for my debut track experience: Silverstone. This is like kicking a football for the first time at Wembley.

McLaren is hosting one of its exclusive Pure owners' experience days, and I've been invited. To prepare, I spent the day before studying videos of races at the circuit and driving it virtually. But any veneer of confidence this may have given me evaporates as I arrive at the track.

The car park is full of McLarens and the attendees are buzzing – although that could be nerves given they're all driving their own cars on track. I'm having to borrow one, for the record.

The Silverstone Wing is our base for the day. Owners are diverse and range in age, gender and seriousness – I can see a few race suits among the majority jeans/T-shirt wearers. There are McLaren merch stalls, racing simulators, free food and drinks and even personalisation booths, where you can spec your next McLaren purchase. McLaren staff tell me the point is to make this feel like more than a track day and promote the brand as a lifestyle. A family, even.

This is felt by many owners I speak to, but it is summed up best by one driver who had flown in from Hong Kong that morning to take delivery of his Solus GT – the one-of-25, 829bhp V10 single-seater that was the fastest up Goodwood's hill in 2023. He's flying back tomorrow afternoon.

After a quick speech from McLaren lead driver coach Jamie Wall – "all we ask is you come back smiling" – it's time to get kitted up and I'm given the green light to get in 'my' 690bhp Artura. I swing up the butterfly doors and climb in. First lesson of the day: never underestimate how much bigger your head is with a helmet on. I did just that – cue hilarious head-bash. Sitting next to me is ex-BTCC racer Jade Edwards, my instructor for the day. "My job is to see how much faster we can make you," she tells me.

The key, she says, is to relax, look ahead, don't overthink and don't be rash – that's how mistakes happen. Edwards also gives me the go-ahead to left-foot brake – something the Artura's set-up has been designed to promote, an engineer tells me later. I keep the gearbox in Auto.

After a thumbs-up from the pit crew we are off down Silverstone's pit lane. Something you don't realise watching it on television is how steep the entry ramp is and how little you can see over your left shoulder as you storm into Village.

Our first lap is just to get acclimatised. Edwards tells me where to brake, where not to, where to turn in, where the apexes are and when to give it full chat. We push harder for the second lap. What I've learned straight away is that while I seem to be pretty good at positioning the Artura, I'm not braking hard enough into corners. "Hard on at first then trail off while turning in," explains Edwards, with admirable patience. Doing so means minimal speed loss on approach and maximum turn-in grip, thanks to the huge forward weight transfer. But despite this, I still find Copse difficult: I'm not turning in early enough, which means I'm losing pace on the exit.

We pull back into the pit lane for a quick debrief – "sometimes you need to go slower to be faster", Edwards tells me – and then we're back out again. Into Village my confidence is oozing and Edwards encourages me to push. "Turn early now," she reminds me into Copse. Down Hangar Straight seconds later I glance down to see 190mph flashing up. It doesn't feel like it.

"Really good," says Edwards, a few laps later as we pull in for the last time and I come down from what feels the biggest adrenaline rush of my life. I'm already planning my next track excursion.

Pure McLaren owners' event turns the track-day concept into a VIP experience

RICHARD MILLE
McLaren PURE

> *"Don't overthink and don't be rash," she says. "That's how mistakes happen"*

Track position good, race pace and lap records to follow

RAISING THE STAKES

For those looking for the ultimate track day, McLaren believes it has the answer. For just over £1 million, Woking will give you your own LMDh Hypercar – only around 30 of which will be made – and train you how to use it at circuits around the globe. The idea is to fund the British brand's return to top-tier endurance racing from 2027, including a Le Mans entry. CEO Nick Collins said the project will offer "a driving sensation few will ever experience".

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

"It's not dynamic, but it's comfortable and well equipped"

FIRST REPORT

VOLKSWAGEN TAYRON

The Tiguan's publicity-shy bigger brother joins the Autocar fleet

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To find out if Volkswagen's anonymous seven-seater SUV deserves its place in the line-up

Volkswagen has a host of very well-known cars – Golf, Passat, Tiguan, ID 3 – but our new long-termer isn't one of them. Since it's arrived on our fleet, not a single person I've come across has known what the model is. Perhaps that's why VW has kindly leant it to us...

This is the Tayron, then, described by more than one colleague as 'a bigger Tiguan'. It is indeed an indirect replacement for the Tiguan Allspace, and it sits between the Tiguan and Touareg.

If it sounds vaguely familiar, it might be because the Tayron did exist already as a Chinese-built model produced in a joint venture with FAW. As of this year, it's a global car, now built in China, Mexico and VW's gargantuan Wolfsburg factory, which is where our European model is from.

My first instinct is that the Tayron isn't integral to VW in the way many of its models are: it doesn't grab headlines like the new electric cars, and it doesn't feel especially evolved or fresh – more like a Tiguan with a bit extra stuck on the back. Sales figures are minimal compared with the Tiguan, at little more than 1% of its smaller sibling's sales, but VW believes there's a place for it, and for a premium volume brand that aims to cater for everyone, it would be remiss not to offer a seven-seat SUV with multiple powertrain options.

Prices start from £41,010, and the line-up is a bit confusing on the configurator: the Tayron can be specified with five or seven seats, five trim levels and powertrains including mild-hybrid petrol, petrol, diesel and plug-in hybrid, the last only in five-seat guise.

The Tayron is 4792mm long, 1853mm wide and 1668mm high, so very similar to the Skoda Kodiaq – not surprising given they share the VW Group's MQB Evo platform.

As I acclimatise, the Tayron feels big on the tight suburban roads near my house, but I've checked and it is shorter than the Bentley Bentayga I ran earlier this year, by 333mm.

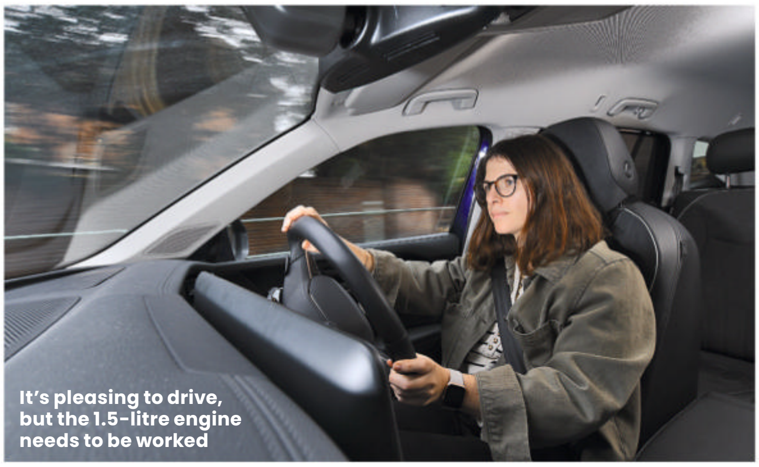
Ours is a seven-seat, mid-level Elegance model with the 148bhp 1.5-litre petrol engine and 48V mild-hybrid assist. This powertrain is by far the most popular, followed by the PHEV. Elegance trim has an overwhelming two pages of features on the spec sheet, but highlights include a 12.9in infotainment system, heated front seats with massage function, four USB-C ports, ambient interior lighting, four drive modes and illuminated VW logos.

Along with the options of a towbar, net partition, tyre pressure monitoring system (a crazy £205 extra) and purple paint, it adds up to £45,000, which seems reasonable value for this much car these days.

When the Tayron arrived, I first looked in that ginormous boot – 1905 litres if you're not using the third row. Given I don't have a large family, those seven seats will be used on visits to friends with children, or for novelty purposes, which means the boot is mostly

SECOND OPINION

After a stint in the Tayron, I was left impressed by its manoeuvrability, comfort and practicality. That said, I'll be intrigued to see if Rachel finds a chance to use the third row of seats and how cramped they prove to be. **JW**


It's pleasing to drive, but the 1.5-litre engine needs to be worked

The Tayron can feel a bit unwieldy on tight urban roads

Huge boot with third row folded

Screen controls most functions

fully in play. I've yet to use the optional partition net, but I quickly found the tonneau cover, which has a special storage slot underneath the boot floor: it's important to me to hide the boot's belongings, given that I park on a suburban street.

The Tayron feels every bit the modern Volkswagen. There's an ample touchscreen and delightfully a centre-console dial for volume. The rotary control can also change the so-called 'Atmospheres', such as 'Joy', 'Energetic' and 'Minimal' – more on that another time – but I've yet to learn whether there's any other, perhaps more useful, functionality available via the dial.

Control of the seven-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox is via a stalk behind the steering wheel. That's quite common these days, but for now I'd rather it was a more traditional one in the centre console. Recently I've driven a couple of cars that don't even have a start button; the Tayron has a standard stop/start button in the centre console next to the volume dial, and a number of times I've forgotten and/or found it inconvenient to turn it off. Sounds a bit ridiculous when you write it, but such is progress in the car world.

So far, driving the Tayron has been pleasant. It's not dynamic, which probably doesn't come as a surprise, but it's comfortable and all that equipment is nice to have. The engine's 148bhp and 184lb ft doesn't sound like much to lug around 1723kg plus occupants, and it does need a persevering foot to get up to higher speeds. I've not yet had the car fully loaded so I'm interested to see how it fares on that front: there are plenty of excited kids ready to test the Tayron and its third row to the max over the next few months.

RACHEL BURGESS

TEST DATA

VOLKSWAGEN TAYRON 1.5 eTSI 150PS ELEGANCE DSG

Price £42,700 **Price as tested** £45,000 **Options** Towbar, electric release with 13-pin electrics and Trailer Assist £1095, Ultra Violet metallic paint with Soul/Black upholstery and Ceramique roeflining £810, tyre pressure monitoring system £205, net partition £190 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 44.1mpg (WLTP)

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rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

JAECOO 7

A new menu brings relief – but we would sooner order buttons

MILEAGE 1968

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To find out why newcomer Jaecoo is one of the UK's fastest-growing brands

I've got a confession. In my previous report, I said the Jaecoo had no auto-hold function, having scrolled through various settings in an effort to find it (following the growing scourge of dashboard design, there are very few actual buttons). It turns out I'm wrong, but I only found out by chance when I was swiping on the main screen to get rid of one menu, when another – one I hadn't seen before – suddenly appeared. This one housed a series of shortcuts for major functions, and there, praise be, was an auto-hold option. The start/stop restarting is still frustratingly slow, but at least I'm not rolling backwards down inclines any more.

Usefully, this recently discovered menu also has a button to turn off the lane departure prevention. On the Jaecoo, this supposed driver aid is so intrusive that you can find yourself fighting with the wheel when the system picks up lines in the road and diverts you off course, so disabling it is a must. Sadly it doesn't remember that preference, like it does auto hold, but it's now only a swipe away.

Both discoveries made the journey to drop off my daughter for a new year at university less of a chore, and to be fair to the 7, this is the kind of task it's particularly good at. The boot's square shape makes it ideal for stacking in boxes of kitchen gubbins and bags of bedding and clothes: a year's worth was accommodated with ease once we'd dropped one back seat, and we could have got it all in the boot had we packed it to the ceiling.

When we got to Oxford I found myself feeling like a pariah. We were there during the city's half-marathon and it was packed, so traffic was horrendous. Inevitably, the Jaecoo's usually sensitive start/stop decided to do more starting than stopping, so to avoid churning out fumes in this notoriously car-unfriendly city I turned the engine off regularly. That automatically unlocks the doors and pops out the exterior handles (à la JLR), so I locked them using the button on my door... which promptly set off the alarm with an extended hoot of the horn, making me look as if I was raging. By that stage I was, but at my own car rather than those in front of me.

ALASTAIR CLEMENTS

LOVE IT

COOL AS A CUCUMBER

Heated seats are pretty much a given these days, but ventilated seats are very much a premium luxury in a £33k car, and here they work superbly.

LOATHE IT

GHOST IN THE MACHINE

The over-sensitive forward collision sensor likes to randomly slam on the brakes, so I've found myself driving more defensively to avoid triggering it – I guess it's doing its job, then?

TEST DATA

JAECOO 7 1.6T AWD LUXURY

Price new £32,850 **Price as tested** £32,850 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 30.7mpg **Last seen** 15.10.25

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alastair.clements@haymarket.com

The Jaecoo swallowed a year's worth of instant noodles and clean socks

Pop Yellow 5 shone in the Cornish gloom, coming third in its class

RENAULT 5

Our car earns its racing wings at the waterlogged Watergate Bay Sprint

MILEAGE 11,307
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To discover if Renault's retro-infused EV hit is as good to live with as it is to look at

It wasn't the most sensible or logical thing I've ever done, entering my Renault 5 long-termer in the Watergate Bay Sprint, a Cornish motorsport event on a closed public road between Newquay and Watergate Bay, about a month ago.

I mean, how well could a brand-new, bog-standard baby EV be expected to do in a proper, Motorsport UK-approved competitive event against 70-odd conventional cars, many of them developed over years for this very purpose?

Three reasons. First, this is the big-battery, 148bhp version. Its acceleration off the mark is much more impressive than that of a similar-power petrol car, because its generous maximum torque of 181lb ft is available from step-off. As well as being invaluable in the traffic, such grunt is ideal for rapid start-line departures and for slingshotting you off start lines and out of slow corners and chicanes (of which Watergate Bay's 930-yard course has three). Second, I reckoned the Renault's small size would help in a September sprint when the weather might be iffy (it was). And third, I figured the Pop Yellow colour would look great in photos (it did).

Debacles aren't often fun, but this event was one of the exceptions. The weather – rain and high winds – combined to make our clifftop perch about as exposed as it could be. Extreme wet, mud on the track and an early competitor's accident (including a very big oil spill) combined to limit our number of runs to three (one practice, two timed) for the day, instead of the half dozen we had hoped for.

Five Goes Down to the Sea – jolly good fun despite lashings of rain

LOVE IT

SEAT COMFORT
The bucket seats resemble those from the original 5 but deliver modern comfort over distance. It's not just the shape, it's also the positioning that works so well.

LOATHE IT

SEEING OUT
As I touched on before, the screen pillars are very thick at the base and unless you're careful can disguise an approaching cyclist.

Yet the car was terrific. It ran a best time of 39 seconds – nothing special but no disgrace. It felt safe and quick, with positive steering and total wet-road stability. Even with rivers of water running down the middle of the track, I felt it could easily have used more power. In our little EV class, I was easily beaten into third by a pair of Tesla Model 3 Performance entries, but I beat a game local entrant in a Nissan Leaf.

On a dry track with a more capable driver than me, the 5 could have sliced five seconds off my best time, and a 5-based Alpine A290 a couple more, but the main thing was that I had fun. Perhaps our little group's biggest win was that of all the clifftop tents competitors were using to protect their gear from the awful weather, ours was the very last in the paddock to blow away…

The whole exploit didn't prove much else, except that it's perfectly easy to drive a 5 from London to Cornwall with one stop (the same number you would choose in a petrol car), relying on a range of 180 miles if you cruise at 65-70mph. You will get around 4.0mpkWh if you do, which is impressive.

My 5 has now passed 11,000 miles in a few months, because it brilliantly combines fun, practicality, park-anywhere compactness and sprightly performance in town or outside.

Even though the 5 has been on sale in the UK for more than nine months and is becoming a reasonably common sight, people still stop me in the street after I've just parked to enquire what it's really like. It's a long time since I've had a mainstream car with universal eye appeal. It must be galling for those who sell or own the Citroën ë-C3 or the Peugeot e-208 (two clear 5 competitors) to see how imperceptibly their cars slip into the mainstream traffic.

In fact, if you're looking for proof that really great styling can make a massive difference to car appeal and consequent sales, the success of the 5 must surely be the best example for many years.

STEVE CROPLEY

TEST DATA

RENAULT 5 COMFORT RANGE ICONIC FIVE
Price new £28,995 **Price as tested** £30,195 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Range** 229 miles **Economy** 4.4mpkWh **Last seen** 15.10.25

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steve.cropley@haymarket.com

VOLVO EX30

It's not a big car but in many ways perfect for parents

MILEAGE 4721
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see if the clever design of this small EV can win us over in extended use

"I wish I'd chosen an EX30 now," said my friend Soph, owner of an EX40. "It just felt a bit out-there without the instrument display, but I think next time I might go for it." Such was our chat when I told her that colleague James Attwood had leant me his long-termer.

I was excited to give the EX30 a try, given there have been a lot of things said about it, positive and otherwise. I like its looks and I enjoyed driving it too. No, it's not the most dynamic car out there, but broadly it's hard to fault given how effortless it is to rub along with.

The finer details are what stood out to me. First, when putting my son's child seat in the rear, I liked how the back seat had been designed so that you pull a neat flap of fabric out to find the Isofix anchors, rather than removing fiddly bits of plastic, which then need to be stored somewhere.

LOVE IT

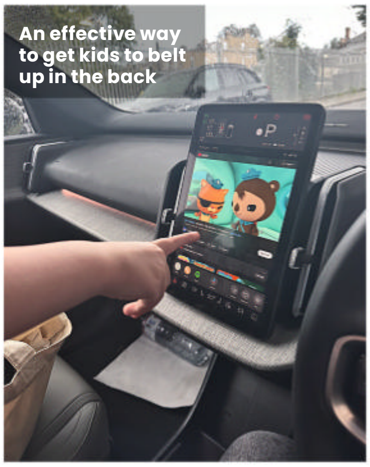
LIKE THE GOOD OLD DAYS

An easy and accessible button to open the boot is refreshing.

LOATHE IT

REDUCED VISION

I've been spoiled by so many 360deg cameras. Parking this car made me engage my brain.


An effective way to get kids to belt up in the back

Small practical touches like this storage tray make a big difference

The little storage trays at the side of the rear seats are an ideal place to store a Peppa Pig and some Octonauts toy figures (if you have an under-five, you'll know what I'm talking about) and overall proved a great hit with my son.

Not as much of a hit, though, as the availability of YouTube on the touchscreen. I showed it to him for the novelty factor when we were parked up and briefly stuck in the car due to a torrential downpour and quickly regretted it. And with that scary dexterity of a toddler on a touchscreen, the next time we were parked up and with friends, he swiftly put YouTube on himself.

For my part, I found changing the position of the side mirrors via touchscreen menus tedious, as I regularly move them for parallel parking purposes.

I also found having to avert my eyes to the middle of the dashboard to check the time or my speed a distraction.

The key without buttons was hit and miss. I always put my son in the car first on the nearside, and the number of times the EX30 failed to unlock was annoying.

Each to their own, but I'm not certain those irritations would ultimately be enough to put me off this car – and if the likes of Soph are open to adapting to these evolving tech trends for their next cars, Volvo won't be doing too badly at all.
RACHEL BURGESS

TEST DATA

VOLVO EX30 SINGLE MOTOR EXTENDED RANGE RWD PLUS

Price new £39,850 **Price as tested** £39,850 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Range** 240 miles **Economy** 3.3mpkWh **Last seen** 24.9.25

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james.attwood@haymarket.com

SNAPSHOTS

BYD DOLPHIN SURF

Mileage 789 **Last seen** 15.10.25
My Dolphin Surf has a lot of equipment, but one big omission is LED headlights. They're reserved for top-spec Comfort models, and the halogen bulbs on this Boost aren't particularly luminous. That means visibility when driving at night and in dark, stormy weather isn't as good as perhaps it should be. Rivals including the Renault 5 get LEDs as standard. **JW**

MAZDA CX-80

Mileage 4394 **Last seen** 15.10.25
Being one of Autocar's biggest ADAS critics, I was dismayed to learn that my CX-80 had been laden with even more of them than necessary via an options pack – then delighted to discover a 'shut up!' button down by my right knee. Regrettably, it turned out not to be the catch-all solution I had assumed: some of the bongs and interventions still have to be deactivated deep in the touchscreen menus. Can't have it all my way, I guess. **KC**

MORGAN SUPER 3

Mileage 1740 **Last seen** 15.10.25
I took the Morgan down to Surrey to have a go in a reader's LCC Rocket (very grateful). It was interesting to see how much bigger the Super 3 seemed next to the cigar-tube car, particularly in terms of width. The Morgan is 1850mm wide, and you sit a long way inboard, so there's lots of it around you. Still, that aids stability: I haven't felt a wobble from it yet. **MP**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A DACIA SANDERO

WHEN DACIA REDEFINED THE TERM 'ECONOMY DRIVE'

The no-frills Sandero was just £6k new. Today it's an even bigger bargain

Good news: you can now have a Dacia Sandero for less than the cost of an annual railway season ticket. The Sandero was designed to rival budget superminis such as the Fiat Panda and Kia Rio but it also represents a compelling alternative to the bus and train. And used prices now start from around £1000.

When the Mk2 version (2013-2020) was launched, it made headlines for all the right reasons. Here was a car with five seats, Isofix mountings, four airbags and a three-year warranty for as little as £5995 – more than £2000 cheaper than a Skoda Citigo. Today, you can get one for a sixth of that.

Now well into its third generation and heading for a fourth, the Sandero is so popular that it consistently ranks as Europe's best-selling car. A new one today will set you back more than £15,000, so bona fide bargain hunters are best served by a tidy second-gen one.

There are a couple of caveats, though. First, be sure to pick the right trim level. Entry-level Access really is entry-level. It has power steering and, well, that's pretty much it. The big plastic bumpers, white paint (the only choice) and steelies (minus hubcaps) make it look like a UN support vehicle. Inside, there isn't even a radio, never mind such frivolities as central locking, air-con or a car alarm.

Unless you've got your eyes on the grand prize at the 2045 Festival of the Unexceptional, we would advise steering clear. Besides, Access models aren't much cheaper than higher-spec versions and they'll be difficult to sell on.

Upper trims have the basic essentials, but avoid entry-level Access

What we said then

27 FEBRUARY 2013

"On refinement, specification and economy, this car gives you more than you're paying for. It's practical, competent to drive and great value. To buyers able to distinguish between their requirements for transport and their desire for it, we welcome the Sandero as the best small car in the real world."

Instead, choose Ambiance or Laureate. The former adds body-coloured bumpers, metallic paint, wheel trims, central locking, a radio and electric front windows. Laureate gets you climate control, cruise control and a leather steering wheel. There's also the rugged Stepway version, which adds plastic cladding, a 40mm suspension lift and chunky roof bars. It all makes the Sandero look a bit funkier but doesn't transform it into a capable off-roader.

Another word of warning is that at higher speeds you start to notice a few more areas where Dacia cut costs. The engines feel the need for a sixth gear, while the numb steering and limited ride sophistication become obvious.

The driving position can also leave something to be desired: the steering wheel doesn't offer any adjustment and the height of the seat cushion is fixed.

The interior feels plain no matter the spec, but it's functional, and Stepway models do have a smarter seat design. Leather is a rare option. On the plus side, it's roomier than more expensive rivals like the Peugeot 208, and dynamically the Dacia can hold its own on tight, twisty or cratered roads.

The range was updated in 2017, when all Sanderos were made to look a bit more appealing, with extra chrome trim and LED running lights. Access models were binned and Ambiance was replaced by Essential and Comfort.

The atmospheric 1.2 petrol (later ditched for a marginally better 1.0) feels slow and inefficient, so seek out the 900cc turbo, which is better in all areas. The 1.5 diesel is the most powerful and efficient option, and from 2016 onwards it's ULEZ-compliant. A five-speed manual is the only gearbox for all engines.

As cars become ever more expensive and complex, the simple, sensible Mk2 Sandero is a breath of fresh air with a definite whiff of future classic about it.

ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

The Sandero is pretty basic, but it can hold its own on a twisty road

> **"On refinement, specification and economy, this car gives you more than you're paying for"**

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

DAVID TURNER

"I bought my Sandero nearly new in 2017, mainly for the price, and it's proved a dependable runabout. Running costs are tiny – cheap insurance, low tax and decent fuel economy. The 0.9 TCe petrol feels lively enough around town, and the boot is bigger than expected. Reliability has been faultless: just routine servicing and tyres. It's no-frills motoring but honest and practical. I'd happily have another; I can't find another car that gives you so much for your money."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ DIESEL PARTICULATE FILTER

Like all modern diesels, the DPF needs cleaning out by taking a longish drive at speed every now and then. If this hasn't happened and it has become clogged, it can cost £1000, including labour, for a new unit.

■ BELTS AND CHAINS

Diesel and atmo petrol Sanderos are belt driven and should have their belts and water pumps changed at six-year or 72,000-mile intervals (typically at least £300). The 0.9 SCe is chain driven and won't last the life of the car, as Dacia claimed. 'Death rattle' can happen as early as 40,000 miles (expect £1400-plus for a new chain) but frequent oil changes will extend that greatly.

■ INTERIOR

Rattles, scuffs and squeaks are to be expected at this price point but they can still be annoying. The interior's fit and finish can vary from car to car, so look at a few if you're not satisfied at first.

■ BODY

Owners have reported extensive rust on their Mk2 Sanderos. It seems to affect only some cars, although not necessarily in correlation with their age or build date. Have a poke around before buying, because an extensive welding job and/or new panels may cost more than the car itself.

■ ELECTRICS

Owners have reported persistent engine management lights (and other dash lights) requiring repeated trips to the dealer, even when nothing is actually wrong.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

The less common Logan MCV is basically a Sandero estate and offers a tremendous amount of boot space – 573 litres with

the back seats up or 1518 litres with them folded down – for very little cash. They weren't big sellers, so you might have to go farther afield to find one, and you'll definitely want the torquey 1.5-litre diesel or the 0.9-litre turbo petrol to cope with any heavier loads or light towing.

However, they make a dependable workhorse when properly looked after – possibly even a good alternative to a small van – and can also be had in rugged-looking Stepway form.

Other than a big boot, they're the same as a Sandero, so watch out for the same problems.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£1000-£2499

Mostly high-mileage cars, but some appear to be in good nick. Only a marginal difference in price between trim levels.

£2500-£4999

A mix of lower-mileage early examples and high-mile facelift cars. A good supply of Stepways, turbo petrols and diesels.

£5000-£7499

Lots of reasonable-mileage, looked-after and good-specification facelift cars.

£7500-£10,000

There seems little point in spending this much on a second-generation Sandero. Most of these cars cost almost as much when they were new.

ONE WE FOUND

DACIA SANDERO STEPWAY 1.5 DCI LAUREATE, 2017, 45,000 MILES, £6350

A £20 annual VED bill, 74.3mpg and enough ground clearance to get over a big kerb. This is all the car many people need. In this specification – it's even got a reversing camera – it hardly looks like a budget option.

My car & I

Dry your eyes, mate. Your Stag's a beauty

Motor shows are where dreams are made, and at the 1976 British International Motor Show, a young Brian Attfield saw a car he dreamed of owning one day. "I went to the show with Dad and couldn't take my eyes off the Stags on the Triumph stand," he says. "I cried because he wouldn't buy one. He bought a Ford Granada instead."

Tears dried, Brian left the show determined to buy a Stag when he was older and could afford to. Some 15 years later, long after the Stag had ceased production, he was in a position to start looking. "I had always wanted a yellow Stag with a manual gearbox, and I viewed 13 pretty average ones," he recalls. "Then in 1993 a more promising example came up for sale in the Thames Valley Trader. It looked very tidy, so I joined Club Triumph to get buying tips.

"On the Saturday I went to see the Triumph at the home of its lady owner. From new it had been her company car, which she then bought from her employer. Another club member kindly offered to view it with me. He took one look and told me to buy it. It was a time well before online bank transfers so I gave the lady £5, the only cash I had, as a deposit and returned on the Monday to pay her the £3800

Our cars

Something borrowed, something blue

BY WILL RIMELL

I got married earlier this year, and the old adage of 'what's mine is yours' seems to have been adopted rather quickly by the now Mrs Rimell. What am I getting at? Well, the wife has sold her car – a Mk1 Nissan Juke – and taken to using my BMW Z4 as her daily driver.

I am in fact very happy about this, since reviewing cars for Autocar means I don't get a lot of time to drive my own, so to know the E89 is getting proper, regular runarounds is great.

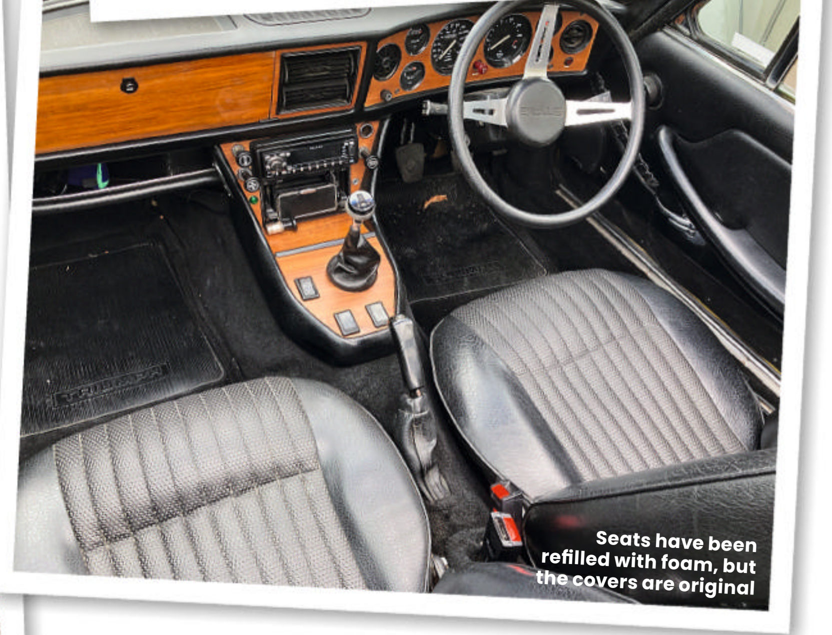
We popped to the shops last weekend and she asked to drive. Fine by me, I said, given I'd never been a passenger in my own car before. How novel. Roof down, the wife driving and the burble of the straight six made for a quite glorious combination.

It still doesn't beat driving it, however, which I realised after we swapped seats for the journey home. It reminded me how much I love the E89's feisty analogue drive.

And it turns out I'm not the only one. Driving the Z4 is transforming the once sensible Juke owner into a proper petrolhead. I even caught her looking at Jaguar XEs in the classifieds yesterday.

Hats off to her: Mrs Rimell has taken a shine to the Z4

Electronic ignition aside, Brian's Stag is in excellent original condition



Seats have been refilled with foam, but the covers are original

> **"It produces a modest 150bhp but is pleasantly torquey and, remarkably, doesn't burn any oil"**

balance. The car, which I still own, is currently insured for £26,000."

Perhaps it was fate, but Brian's Stag, a 3.0-litre V8, was registered in 1976, the year he stood weeping at the motor show. It's finished in Inca Yellow, a particularly rich shade Brian prefers to that other Stag yellow, Mimosa Yellow. "Naturally it has faded over time, but in all the years I've owned it I've only had to repaint the front," he says. "It was hard to match with the other panels and had to be blended in, but I'm happy with the result."

When Brian bought the car in 1993 it was showing 68,000 miles; it's now on 92,000. That's not a huge increase, but the car has remained reliable throughout. "Stag Classics in Alton, Hampshire, look after it and do an excellent job," says Brian. "The engine is standard and original apart from electronic ignition. It produces a modest 150bhp but is pleasantly torquey and, remarkably, doesn't burn any oil."

A feature of his Stag that Brian especially likes is the overdrive switch on the gearknob. "It's a four-speed gearbox with overdrive on third and fourth," he says. "Using the switch, you just flick up and down through the gears. It takes the hassle out of driving on country lanes." The Triumph Stag has a T-bar roof, a safety requirement for the US market that also helps stiffen the body. It looks cool, and viewed from above it frames the car's interior, which is in amazingly good, original condition. "They're still the original vinyl seats," says Brian. "I've had them refilled but not reupholstered."

Elsewhere on the car, the wheels are also original and standard, although Brian recently had them refurbished. At the same time, he changed the tyres. "The earlier ones had become really hard," he says. "The difference in the steering and the ride on these new ones is phenomenal." Will he ever sell his Stag, I ask. "Never!" replies Brian. "It's part of the family."

JOHN EVANS

Head to head

MATT PRIOR

2009 AUDI A8L

VS

STEVE CROPLEY

2013 RANGE ROVER L405

Brief: Find a 1990s or 2000s car that's still modern today for under £18,000

SC I've gone for this private-sale Range Rover 5.0 Autobiography petrol with 56,000 miles. It's £19.5k before haggling, so I think I could do a deal around the £17.5k mark.

MP I like it. That money gets you the best Audi A8 there is, so mine is a 4.2 V8 diesel with 60k miles for £8k. It's the long one, and it looks immaculate.

SC You could have two of those for the money I'm spending. I remember this Range Rover fondly, and values have stabilised. It's got all the bells and whistles and would slot into my life nicely.

MP Mine does look a little dated inside because of that clonky gearlever and diddy little infotainment screen. But I could cover massive distances in it without a second thought.

SC But if you buy anything older the nav's still going to be rubbish, and it would be the same with the Range Rover. That is a bargain, though, at £8k. My son has just bought a second-hand Hyundai i10 for that. I think you've made the better choice because of the value.

MP Now I'm thinking how nice yours would be…

SC Well it suits me because I can see over walls in it, but I'm not sure that's worth another nine grand.

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF R32
2006, 95,000 miles, £9500
The R32's 247bhp 3.2-litre V6 and four-wheel drive get it to 60mph in just over 6sec. This United Grey example is in excellent order, even at 95,000 miles. It has a full history and a fresh MOT, and it was recently treated to a Haldex service.

FORD S-MAX 2.5 TITANIUM
2007, 154,000 miles, £2789
This well-used S-Max is ideal for getting the kids to school in a hurry. It looks like a conventional MPV but has the same 2.5-litre five-cylinder engine as the Mk2 Focus ST. Its mileage is substantial, but it has an MOT until next September and a decent history file.

SAAB 9-5 2.8T V6 AERO AUTO XWD
2010, 88,000 miles, £9200
This second-generation 9-5 has the rare 296bhp V6 petrol engine and has been cared for by its current owner for the past 12 years. It may be 15 years old, but this Swedish barge doesn't seem to have aged one bit.

PORSCHE 911 3.4 996 CARRERA 4 AWD
2002, 387,000 miles, £8925
Despite a staggering mileage, this 911 looks in good order, with all servicing and maintenance done at a main dealer. The engine has been rebuilt and it's got new dampers and brakes.

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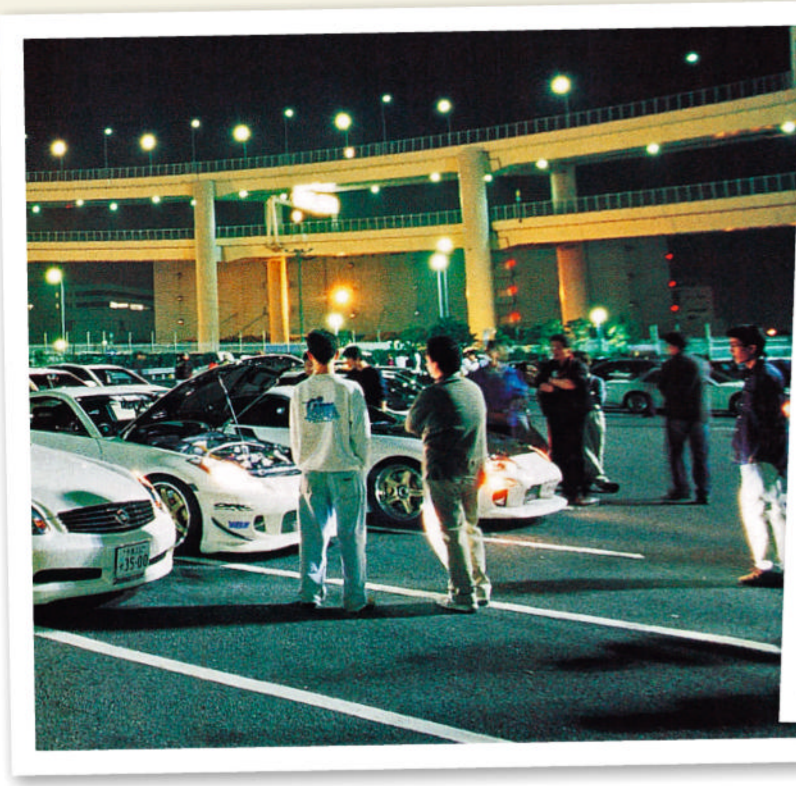
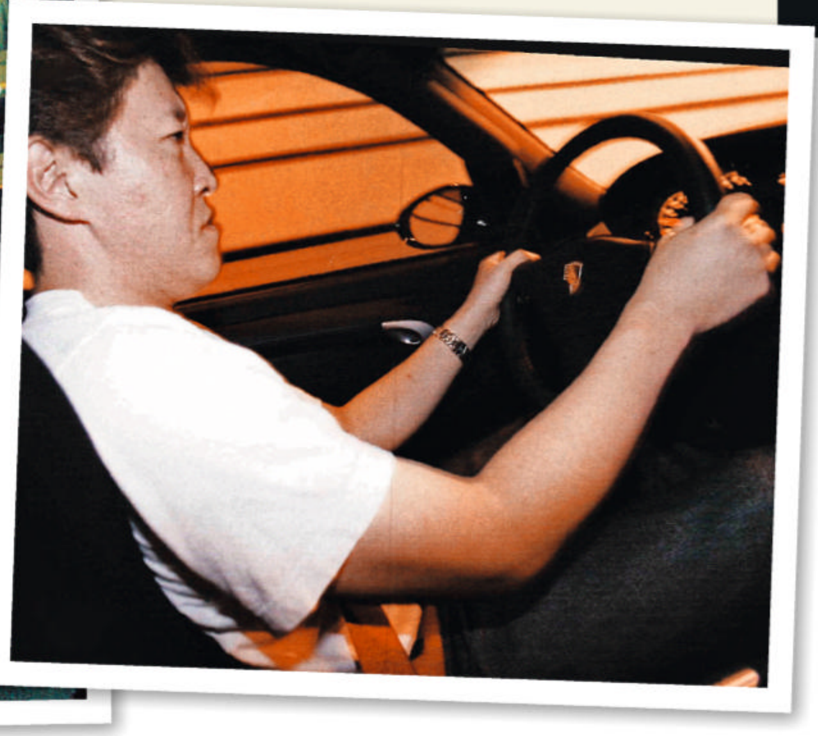




Japan's street racers scare the daylights out of us

As Japan's automotive industry began to flourish in the 1960s and produce sporty cars, Japanese enthusiasts took to the country's stunning mountain roads to race one another, often in highly modified machinery – and driving in such a fashion grew in popularity and spread to urban expressways.

Supposedly some street racing clubs had codes intended to protect the public as much as possible, with members haunting the small hours and frowning upon those weaving through traffic. But of course such activity was nevertheless illegal, and an arrest could result in serious prison time and the end of a career. Yet the scene was quick to grow and won a cult following in the West.

Participants weren't just boy racers in uglified hot hatches but committed enthusiasts who could afford tech-heavy, turbocharged JDM coupés and even European supercars. Among them was the Yoshida 'Blackbird', perhaps the fastest Porsche 911 in the world. Its owner belonged to probably the most famous group of all, Mid Night Club, whose barrier to entry was a car capable of doing 250kph (155mph) – and this was in the early 1980s.

By the turn of the century, Japanese street racing had inspired many TV shows, films and video games. So when our Chas Hallett was in Japan in 2003, curiosity got the better of him and he headed to the infamous Daikoku service station one Friday night. There he found himself among hundreds of tricked-out performance cars and petrolheads – not to mention techno DJs and fast food vans. It felt like a festival, not a criminal gathering.

Hallett had arrived not in a weedy hire car but in a 740bhp R34 Nissan Skyline GT-R, driven by a member of Top Secret Club (no corporate risk assessments back then…) in convoy with a 650bhp Toyota Supra, a 400bhp G35 Skyline and a 430bhp Nissan Fairlady Z.

"It's a pretty intense place to be," he wrote. "There's never more than a three-metre gap between any of the cars as we start slicing through the late-night traffic, passing mere mortals whichever side is easiest."

The toll booth for entry onto the Wangan expressway soon appeared. "Mokoto pockets his change and nails the Nissan away from the booth. Violent. Each gearchange slams my torso way back into the Recaro, even though I'm wedged in a full racing harness. You don't just hear that heavily modified 2.6-litre straight six either, you feel it. Every point of contact I've got, right on through to my fingers tightly gripping the grab handle, throbs and vibrates in tune with Mr Koyanagi's right clog."

This was despite the fine for doing 150kph in a 100kph zone having recently risen fivefold to £2500 and the penalty for hitting 300kph being a lifetime driving ban and the possibility of six months behind bars.

In fact, just a week before we attended, Daikoku had been raided. "There's too much heat from police," lamented Akiko Yamamoto (one of the few female attendees), telling Hallett it would be the last showing for her Lexus Altezza.

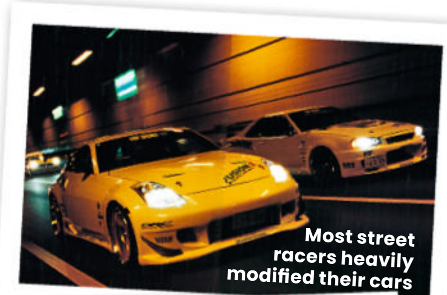
Little wonder, then, that a similar 2005 Autocar article by Bill Thomas was titled 'The last samurai'. He was introduced by the anonymous president of Mid Night Club to a Mr Kobayashi, the fastest driver of the Gorugo club – "the fastest and most committed of them all" but recently forced to disband by the authorities. Kobayashi's record average speed for the 50mph-limited Tokyo ring road, driving his 550bhp modified GT-R, stood in the triple figures.

Hurtling through the 9.6km Chiba tunnel beneath Tokyo Bay, "Kobayashi is a picture of perfectly still concentration", wrote Thomas. "After a short time, he smiles and holds up three fingers: 300kph. It's a strangely peaceful moment, and the sound from the flat six in that concrete tube will haunt me forever. Retirement must have come hard for the fastest street racer of them all."

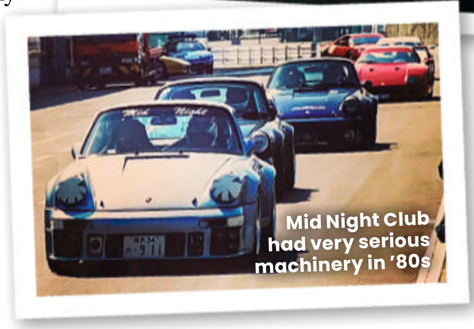
Street racing in Japan does still exist, but it is greatly diminished. Even the Mid Night Club has now switched entirely to circuit racing. This enables its members to more reliably establish who has the best car and the sharpest skills, so they say, but the decision was also taken because of the increased prevalence of dashcams (not that any member was ever actually caught by one).

For the best, of course – but what a fascinating milieu there once was.

KRIS CULMER



Most street racers heavily modified their cars



Mid Night Club had very serious machinery in '80s

MEMBERS OF RACING TEAM MID NIGHT

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In pre-war years, we concerned ourselves with braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later our attention shifted to take in acceleration, top speed, stopping distance and cruising noise level.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated states of battery charge.

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Matt Saunders, road test editor

STAR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Autocar star ratings aren't like those you may read elsewhere. We don't simply give the best car in any given class five stars, the worst one star and filter the rest in between.

Rather than thinking in entirely relative terms, we rank cars according to more abstract definitions of their performance, functionality and fitness for purpose, so that every particular verdict means something and has a degree of permanence.

We also penalise cars up to a star for what we consider particularly conspicuous and regressive failings concerning active safety systems or missing instrumentation or physical secondary controls.

☆ Hopeless, egregious. In some cases, potentially dangerous.
⯪ Appalling. An emphatic failure.
★ Very poor. Consistently flawed or seriously misconceived.
★⯪ Inadequate. Sub-standard in key areas.
★★ Mediocre. Acceptable at best.
★★⯪ Competent. Mostly average, with very few highlights.
★★★ Respectable. Consistently decent, with some strengths.
★★★⯪ Good. Well rounded and competitive in key areas.
★★★★ Very good. Sets some new class standards and misses few.
★★★★⯪ Excellent. Extends several key class standards.
★★★★★ Exceptional, unsurpassed. All but flawless.

Car	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
ABARTH								
500 Esseesse	★★★★☆	25.3.09	Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo	★★★⯪☆	9.8.23	A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione	★★★⯪☆	26.2.14	Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-
ALFA ROMEO								
Giulia Quadrifoglio	★★★★⯪	29.3.17	Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione	★★★⯪☆	3.1.18	Likeable, if short of class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio	★★★⯪☆	9.1.19	A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD	★★★★☆	28.6.23	Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-
ALPINE								
A110 Première Edition	★★★★★	16.5.18	Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT	★★★★⯪	9.3.22	The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R	★★★⯪☆	15.11.23	Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-
ARIEL								
Atom 4	★★★★★	9.10.19	Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-
ASTON MARTIN								
Vantage	★★★★⯪	18.9.24	Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera	★★★★★	21.11.18	Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
Vanquish	★★★★⯪	26.3.25	Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT.	3.1	2.3	1951	25.8	-
DBX 707	★★★★☆	30.11.22	A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-
AUDI								
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition	★★★⯪☆	2.10.19	Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback	★★★⯪☆	18.11.20	Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS3 Sportback Carbon Vorsprung	★★★★☆	9.7.25	Uber-A3 refuses to be defined just by its truly special five-cylinder engine.	3.6	3.3	1619	34.1	-
S5 Launch Edition	★★★★☆	15.1.25	Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A6 E-Hybrid Launch Edition Quattro	★★★☆☆	1.10.25	Big executive saloon is spec-dependent – and misses its marks here.	5.8	5.2	2197	40.0	52
S6 E-tron Avant Launch Edition	★★★⯪☆	16.4.25	Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character.	3.7	2.9	2346	2.8	256
RS6 Avant GT	★★★★☆	5.2.25	Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport	★★★⯪☆	11.7.18	Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport	★★★⯪☆	17.6.20	Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro	★★★★⯪	26.6.19	A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro	★★★⯪☆	2.6.21	A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport	★★★⯪☆	9.11.16	Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic	★★★★☆	20.3.19	More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport	★★★⯪☆	7.7.21	Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 TDI Quattro 204PS S Line	★★★⯪☆	14.5.25	Pleasant and competitive but no particular step forward.	6.7	7.1	2072	42.6	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1	★★★⯪☆	2.10.24	EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	-	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line	★★★★☆	12.8.15	Plush, suave and spacious but so-so to drive.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro	★★★★⯪	26.10.16	A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line	★★★★☆	26.9.18	Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus	★★★★☆	30.12.15	Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-
S E-tron GT	★★★★☆	2.4.25	Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge.	3.1	2.4	2361	2.8	262
BENTLEY								
Bentayga W12	★★★★⯪	18.5.16	Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline	★★★★☆	24.4.24	Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT Speed	★★★★☆	22.12.21	Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S	★★★★⯪	19.4.23	Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Continental GT Speed Hybrid First Edition	★★★★☆	16.4.25	Electrons make fastest GT quicker but not necessarily better.	3.1	2.5	2462	28.0	47
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner	★★★★⯪	17.8.22	Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Flying Spur Speed First Edition
★★★★☆ 21.5.25
Hulking V8 hybrid powertrain broadens Spur's remit and skyrockets performance.
3.2 2.7 2750 26.7 44

BMW

120 M Sport ★★★⯨☆ 31.12.24
Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.
7.3 6.8 1489 45.8 -

218i M Sport Gran Coupé
★★★☆☆ 8.4.20
Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.
8.8 8.4 1375 58.2 -

220i M Sport Coupé ★★★★☆ 1.6.22
A good coupé rather than a great sports car.
7.3 7.3 1546 46.8 -

M2 Coupé Manual ★★★★⯨ 12.7.23
Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.
4.5 3.8 1687 32.1 -

320d M Sport Auto ★★★★★ 15.5.19
BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.
6.9 6.8 1639 63.3 -

330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring ★★★★⯨ 15.1.20
An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.
5.5 5.2 1922 52.6 -

330e M Sport ★★★★⯨ 1.7.20
Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.
- - 1740 - -

M440i xDrive ★★★★☆ 6.1.21
A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.
4.1 3.7 1775 44.0 -

M4 Competition ★★★★⯨ 21.4.21
A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.
3.9 2.9 1800 32.7 -

M4 CS ★★★★☆ 23.4.25
Stunning performance and pace comes with costs that aren't so easy to justify.
2.9 2.5 1747 32.4 -

i4 M50 ★★★★☆ 19.1.22
Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.
4.1 3.2 2248 - 186

M4 CSL ★★★★☆ 16.11.22
A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.
3.6 2.7 1625 31.1 -

M5 ★★★⯨☆ 29.1.25
A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.
3.5 2.8 2373 27.3 35

i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro ★★★⯨☆ 29.11.23
Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.
5.4 4.4 2213 - 235

550e xDrive M Sport Pro
★★★★☆ 3.4.24
Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.
4.4 3.5 2232 40.1 47

750e xDrive M Sport ★★★★⯨ 15.10.25
Look beyond its divisive design for a highly accomplished limousine.
4.8 4.2 2472 35.6 47

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

i7 xDrive60 M Sport ★★★★⯨ 15.2.23
It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.
4.5 3.4 2758 - 264

840d xDrive ★★★★☆ 16.1.19
A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.
5.0 4.6 1901 49.2 -

M8 Competition Convertible
★★★⯨☆ 5.2.20
Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.
3.3 2.7 2020 31.6 -

M8 Competition ★★★⯨☆ 3.6.20
Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.
- - 1960 - -

X1 xDrive23i M Sport ★★★⯨☆ 25.1.23
A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.
6.4 6.0 1800 45.6 -

X4 M Competition ★★★☆☆ 13.11.19
Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.
4.0 3.3 2028 29.0 -

X5 xDrive30d M Sport ★★★★☆ 2.1.19
Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.
6.6 6.6 2279 43.1 -

X6 M Competition ★★★☆☆ 20.3.24
Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.
3.5 3.1 2442 29.3 -

X7 M60i xDrive ★★★★☆ 29.3.23
Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.
4.2 3.7 2600 28.9 -

iX xDrive60 M Sport ★★★★⯨ 9.7.25
Took the luxury EV to new heights in 2022 and nobody has caught up yet. Still great.
4.2 3.3 2637 2.7 314

Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack
★★★★☆ 21.8.24
Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.
5.7 5.9 1561 36.9 -

BMW ALPINA

B3 GT Touring ★★★★⯨ 15.1.25
Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.
3.3 2.7 1910 29.4 -

B8 Gran Coupé ★★★★☆ 22.9.21
Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.
3.5 2.8 2100 - -

BYD

Dolphin Surf Boost ★★★★☆ 6.8.25
Efficient, well packaged and well priced. Its minor transgressions are forgivable.
12.0 13.0 1385 3.9 173

Atto 3 Design ★★★☆☆ 31.5.23
Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.
7.0 6.2 1787 - 201

Seal Design ★★★⯨☆ 17.1.24
Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.
5.8 4.7 2116 - 279

CATERHAM

Seven 160 ★★★★☆ 20.11.13
Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.
8.4 8.7 510 44.8 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Seven 620S ★★★★⯨ 9.3.16
Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.
3.8 4.2 650 29.5 -

Seven 420 Cup ★★★★⯨ 31.8.22
Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.
4.2 3.4 560 35.3 -

CHEVROLET

Corvette 3LT ★★★★☆ 22.6.22
Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.
3.9 3.2 1679 32.9 -

Corvette Z06 3LZ ★★★★☆ 16.8.23
Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.
3.1 2.4 1670 26.1 -

CITROEN

Ami Colour ★★⯨☆☆ 11.1.23
Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.
- - 471 - 39

ë-C3 Max ★★★⯨☆ 30.4.25
Predictable limitations but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money.
10.7 10.3 1479 2.8 -

C3 Aircross Hybrid 136 Max
★★★⯨☆ 22.10.25
Keenly priced and cleverly packaged – if you order with care.
9.3 8.6 1381 41.5 -

C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto
★★★☆☆ 26.5.21
Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.
9.5 9.2 1320 56.4 -

ë-C4 X Shine ★★★⯨☆ 3.5.23
EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.
9.7 8.8 1623 - 162

C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus
★★★⯨☆ 13.2.19
Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.
9.0 8.5 1540 47.8 -

C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus
★★★★☆ 28.9.22
Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.
7.8 7.1 1502 47.8 -

CUPRA

Born 204PS 58kWh V3 ★★★⯨☆ 6.7.22
As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.
6.7 6.2 1794 - 220

Born VZ First Edition ★★★★☆ 9.10.24
An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.
5.4 4.2 1996 3.5 269

Leon Estate 310PS VZ3 ★★★★☆ 8.9.21
Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.
4.9 4.3 1707 40.1 -

Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2 ★★★★☆ 27.7.22
Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.
5.9 4.7 1468 43.4 -

Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG ★★★⯨☆ 23.1.19
Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.
4.9 4.4 1615 36.7 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG
★★★★⯨ 3.2.21
Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.
5.1 4.3 1583 36.4 -

Terramar 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2
★★★★☆ 18.6.25
Hottish cousin of the Volkswagen Tiguan is likeable but a bit too sensible.
5.6 5.1 1737 35.0 -

Tavascan V1 ★★★☆☆ 5.2.25
Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.
6.0 5.0 2129 3.2 246

DACIA

Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige
★★★★☆ 28.4.21
Compromised in surprisingly few areas.
11.9 11.9 1096 54.1 -

Jogger TCe 110 Comfort ★★★★⯨ 20.4.22
Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.
11.0 11.0 1267 48.5 -

Duster Hybrid 140 Journey
★★★★⯨ 27.11.24
Notably improved yet barely any pricier.
9.7 8.7 1413 40.2 -

Bigster Hybrid 155 Journey
★★★★☆ 11.6.25
Big Duster in name, big Duster in nature.
8.9 7.8 - 47.5 -

DS

3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige
★★★☆☆ 10.7.19
No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.
8.8 8.3 1205 48.6 -

4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+
★★★⯨☆ 29.6.22
High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.
7.4 6.0 1706 44.7 26

7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige
★★★⯨☆ 19.9.18
DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.
8.6 7.0 1616 44.6 -

7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première
★★★⯨☆ 26.4.23
More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.
5.7 4.6 1956 36.6 29

9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus
★★★⯨☆ 2.2.22
Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.
8.6 7.1 1886 44.7 20

FERRARI

296 GTB ★★★★★ 21.12.22
Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.
2.7 1.9 1648 37.8 15

SF90 Stradale ★★★★☆ 3.11.21
Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.
2.5 1.8 1698 24.4 16

FIAT

500 Twinair Lounge ★★★⯨☆ 24.11.10
Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.
11.7 13.0 1070 42.1 -

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500e 42kWh Icon	★★★★☆	26.1.22	More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.	8.1	7.7	1365	-	142
600e La Prima	★★★⯪☆	27.3.24	Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.	8.8	7.7	1587	-	173

FORD

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X	★★★★⯪	20.2.19	Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.	8.9	7.8	1417	43.8	-
Focus ST	★★★★☆	11.9.19	Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.	6.1	4.9	1433	40.7	-
Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium	★★★★⯪	25.3.20	The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.	10.0	9.6	1260	50.0	-
Puma Gen-E Select	★★★★☆	4.6.25	Ford finally brings engagement to the small EV class.	7.2	7.2	-	3.4	179
Puma ST	★★★★☆	24.3.21	Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.	7.2	6.2	1301	41.5	-
Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD	★★★⯪☆	23.10.24	Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.	5.8	4.8	2067	2.9	262
Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line	★★★⯪☆	24.6.20	Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.	-	-	1844	-	-
Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD	★★★★☆	23.6.21	Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.	6.8	5.6	2130	-	-
Mustang Mach-E GT AWD	★★★☆☆	27.4.22	Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.	4.2	3.5	2298	-	-
Mustang Dark Horse	★★★⯪☆	20.11.24	Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.	4.5	3.5	1853	26.1	-
Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium	★★★⯪☆	10.7.24	Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.	10.8	10.6	1426	47.4	-
Tourneo Connect 1.5 Ecoboost PHEV Titanium	★★★⯪☆	2.7.25	PHEV power is a smart choice in this versatile, though expensive, utility MPV.	9.7	9.5	1876	40.3	64
Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited	★★★★☆	8.5.24	Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.	12.1	11.8	1971	38.8	-
Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak	★★★★⯪	14.6.23	Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.	9.8	9.9	2348	36.6	-

GENESIS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line	★★★⯪☆	10.11.21	Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.	7.2	6.7	1751	60.4	-
Electrified G80	★★★⯪☆	12.10.22	Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.	4.4	4.0	2349	-	272
GV60 Sport Plus	★★★★☆	24.8.22	Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.	3.8	3.1	2192	-	220
GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater	★★★⯪☆	15.9.21	Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.	6.7	6.6	2217	45.0	-

GWM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ora Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition	★★⯪☆☆	1.2.23	Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.	7.7	7.2	1580	-	154

HONDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
E Advance	★★★⯪☆	26.8.20	More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.	7.9	-	1535	-	110
Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX	★★★⯪☆	7.10.20	Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.	9.6	10.0	1248	57.0	-
Civic Type R	★★★★☆	10.9.25	Road-legal touring car vibe perfected. Sensational – if a little serious.	5.4	4.5	1417	37.4	-
HR-V e:HEV Advance Style	★★★⯪☆	24.11.21	Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.	9.2	9.3	1397	43.2	-
e:Ny1 Advance	★★★☆☆	1.11.23	EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.	8.6	6.9	1756	-	211

HYUNDAI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
i10 1.2 MPi Premium	★★★★☆	15.4.20	Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.	12.3	12.9	999	52.5	-
Inster 49kWh Long Range 02	★★★⯪☆	24.9.25	Dinky looks but a surprisingly grown-up and versatile ownership experience.	9.6	8.8	-	3.3	179
i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect	★★★⯪☆	24.2.21	Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.	9.7	10.1	1065	63.5	-
i20 N	★★★★⯪	25.8.21	N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.	6.1	5.4	1231	50.6	-
Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate	★★★⯪☆	7.6.23	Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.	7.2	6.2	2006	-	272
Kona 1.0 120PS Advance	★★★★☆	6.9.23	Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.	10.4	10.3	1352	50.4	-
Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium	★★★★☆	17.3.21	Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.	7.6	6.2	1612	47.7	-
Ioniq 5 N	★★★★★	7.8.24	A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.	3.5	2.7	2221	-	224
Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium	★★★★☆	16.10.24	A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.	7.9	7.5	2007	32.9	-
Nexo	★★★⯪☆	12.6.19	Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.	9.6	9.7	1852	-	-

INEOS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster	★★★⯪☆	20.9.23	Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.	8.0	8.1	2682	20.9	-

JAECOO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
7 SHS 2WD Luxury	★★⯪☆☆	9.4.25	Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws.	7.3	6.4	1814	35.0	41

JAGUAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD	★★★⯪☆	17.4.19	Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.	6.6	6.2	1727	36.8	-
E-Pace D180 AWD SE	★★★⯪☆	11.4.18	Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.	9.9	10.5	1768	49.2	-
I-Pace EV400 S	★★★★⯪	12.9.18	Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.	4.5	3.5	2236	-	-
F-Pace SVR	★★★★⯪	24.7.19	Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.	4.1	3.5	2070	29.4	-
F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★⯪	1.12.21	Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.	5.1	4.6	2264	-	24
F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé	★★★★☆	29.4.20	The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.	-	-	1743	-	-

JEEP

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Avenger Electric Summit	★★★⯪☆	24.1.24	Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.	8.3	6.9	1601	-	172
Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★⯪☆	3.10.18	Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.	11.0	11.5	1540	44.8	-
Compass 4xe S	★★★☆☆	16.2.22	Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.	6.4	5.7	1872	46.9	22
Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★⯪☆	28.10.15	Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.	10.8	11.2	1502	52.6	-
Renegade 4xe Trailhawk	★★★☆☆	30.6.21	Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.	6.7	5.6	1816	39.4	21
Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland	★★★★☆	10.4.19	Off-road icon is now more competent on it.	9.0	9.1	2122	37.6	-

KGM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Tivoli XLV ELX Auto	★★★☆☆	14.9.16	Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.	12.0	12.6	1469	-	-
Torres 1.5T K40 AWD	★★⯪☆☆	4.6.25	Cheerful enough, although not as cheap or capable as we had hoped.	11.3	12.0	1661	35.0	-

KIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Picanto 1.0 MPI 2	★★★⯪☆	11.9.24	No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.	13.4	13.9	985	51.4	-

TOP 3

LONGEST-RANGE EVs

1 BMW iX3

2 Mercedes-Benz CLA EQ

3 Mercedes-Benz EQS

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

1975 LANCIA BETA MONTE CARLO

Mid-engined two-seat sports coupé designed and built by Pininfarina with the Beta saloon's flat-twin-cam engine. "Ride is comfortable over most surfaces. Corners with little roll. Design is eminently practical, performance is respectable and potential economy is high."

Price £5511 (at RHD launch in 1976)
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1995cc, petrol
Power 120bhp at 6000rpm
Torque 121lb ft at 3500rpm
Weight 1190kg
0-60mph 9.8sec
0-100mph 30.5sec
Top speed 120mph
Economy 25.2mpg

1966 CHRYSLER VALIANT PREMIUM

First Aussie-built car sold in UK is big V8 saloon. "Impressively smooth automatic transmission well matched to powerful and unobtrusive engine. Steering and suspension much more to European standards than American. Roomy. Good value."

Price £2295
Engine V8, 4473cc, petrol
Power 180bhp at 4200rpm
Torque 260lb ft at 1600rpm
Weight 1573kg
0-60mph 11.3sec
0-100mph 42.0sec
Top speed 109mph
Economy 18.1mpg

READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE*

*For three weeks from publication date

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition	★★★½☆	20.11.19	Looks good and drives well yet lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban	★★★½☆	5.7.23	Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3	★★★★☆	7.9.22	A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line	★★★★☆	31.12.24	New-era Niro is rationally compelling although it's not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S	★★★½☆	15.6.22	Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S	★★★★☆	9.10.24	Not the outstanding EV it once was yet still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	-	2.9	227
EV6 GT	★★★½☆	4.10.23	Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2	★★★½☆	20.1.21	Lacks polish, although its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S	★★★★☆	31.1.24	Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante	★★★★½	11.10.17	Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD	★★★★½	20.5.20	Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto	★★★★½	4.12.24	New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus	★★★★☆	3.7.19	Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★½	10.2.21	A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE	★★★★☆	8.1.20	Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury	★★★★½	12.4.17	A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE	★★★½☆	30.8.17	Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X	★★★★½	13.5.20	World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Defender 110 P635 Octa Edition 1	★★★★½	30.4.25	Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring.	4.6	3.7	2717	22.1	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE	★★★★½	2.11.22	Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One	★★★½☆	28.8.24	More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE	★★★★½	13.7.22	A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
Range Rover P550e Autobiography	★★★★☆	9.4.25	A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form.	4.9	4.0	2979	26.6	44

LEXUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design	★★★½☆	29.5.24	Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack	★★★★☆	16.3.22	Interesting, refined and efficient, although not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport	★★★½☆	22.3.23	Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi	★★★½☆	6.2.19	Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
RC F Ultimate Edition	★★★½☆	6.11.24	Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi	★★★☆☆	7.2.24	MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Emira V6 First Edition	★★★★½	2.4.25	The British sports car is alive, well and expensive.	4.4	4.0	1493	29.0	-
Emeya 600 GT	★★★★☆	28.5.25	A good electric saloon and a good Lotus.	4.1	2.8	2478	2.4	218
Eletre R	★★★½☆	24.7.24	There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216
Evija	★★★★☆	30.7.25	Mind-blowingly fast and intense, with some defining digital inhibitions.	2.8	1.9	1906	2.2	122

MASERATI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Grecale Trofeo	★★★½☆	18.10.23	A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante S Granlusso	★★★½☆	8.5.19	Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo	★★★½☆	11.9.24	An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore	★★★½☆	26.2.25	Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo	★★★★☆	16.10.24	Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav	★★★★☆	22.4.15	The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport	★★★★☆	6.11.19	Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech	★★★½☆	10.3.21	Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line	★★★★☆	19.2.25	Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav	★★★★☆	28.6.17	Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line	★★★½☆	10.5.23	Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav	★★★★½	2.9.15	An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-

McLAREN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
720S	★★★★★	24.5.17	Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-
750S	★★★★☆	19.6.24	McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura	★★★★½	19.10.22	Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Artura Spider	★★★★½	6.11.24	Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.	3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17
GT	★★★½☆	27.1.21	Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.	3.3	2.3	1580	34.2	

MERCEDES-AMG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A45 S 4Matic+ Plus	★★★★½	4.3.20	AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.	4.1	3.3	1661	41.5	-
C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate	★★★☆☆	31.7.24	Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.	3.3	2.8	2217	27.1	7.1
CLE 53 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus	★★★★☆	20.8.25	Appealing GT leaves something on the table.	3.9	3.5	2012	26.9	-
GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé	★★★★½	13.3.19	AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.	3.3	2.7	2135	30.1	-
GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé	★★★½☆	21.6.23	Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.	2.9	2.5	2339	23.9	6
EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition	★★★★☆	8.6.22	Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.	3.6	2.8	2673	-	259
S63 E Performance Night Edition	★★★★☆	2.10.24	Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.	3.5	2.7	2666	26.1	-
GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★½☆	14.10.20	Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.	5.4	4.9	2471	29.4	-
SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★½☆	26.7.23	Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.	3.5	2.8	1939	26.2	-
GT 43 Premium Coupé	★★★★☆	3.9.25	Less grunt with more grin for less outlay – but a rear-driven GT 55 would be better still.	4.5	3.7	-	36.6	-
GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé	★★★½☆	14.8.24	Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.	3.1	2.7	1972	30.7	-

MERCEDES-BENZ

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A200 AMG Line Executive	★★★★☆	24.5.23	Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.	7.8	7.3	1396	59.3	-
A250e AMG Line Premium	★★★☆☆	5.8.20	Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.	6.7	5.4	1665	57.8	-
B180 Sport	★★★★☆	3.4.19	In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.	8.4	8.3	1405	51.3	-
C300e AMG Line	★★★★½	4.5.22	Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.	5.8	5.1	2005	49.0	48
E220d AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	3.1.24	An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.	7.2	5.9	1917	65.8	-
E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus	★★★★½	19.3.25	Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need.	4.9	4.3	2167	46.1	-
EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★½☆	4.1.23	Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.	6.0	5.5	2386	-	262
EQS 450+ Business Class	★★★★☆	7.5.25	Progress has been made, but this limousine still isn't quite the ultimate luxury EV.	5.9	4.9	2608	2.6	248
EQS 450 Business Class SUV	★★★½☆	6.3.24	Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.	5.5	5.2	2899	-	265
S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive	★★★★½	6.4.22	Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.	5.2	4.2	2530	37.0	45
EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	17.11.21	Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.	8.4	7.6	2030	-	200
GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★½☆	16.9.20	Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.	7.4	7.1	1810	55.4	-
EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★½☆	18.5.22	A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.	7.7	6.8	2235	-	-
GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★½☆	13.9.23	Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.	6.5	6.0	1929	41.2	-
GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★½☆	12.2.20	Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.	6.5	6.0	2634	38.2	-
G350d AMG Line	★★★★☆	17.7.19	Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.	7.5	7.2	2451	31.3	-
G500 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	25.9.24	Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.	5.1	4.5	-	30.7	-
G580 with EQ Technology	★★★½☆	17.9.25	Electric G-Class has no true raison d'être but is still strangely compelling.	4.5	3.9	3140	1.6	209
CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.	6.1	5.5	2122	37.1	49

MG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★½☆	12.6.24	No bad vices but lacks a final layer of polish.	6.8	6.2	1311	47.9	-
4 EV Long Range SE	★★★★☆	5.4.23	Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.	7.1	6.1	1692	-	185
S5 EV Long Range Trophy	★★★★☆	23.7.25	It outstrips expectations for the money, except on range.	6.0	5.1	1723	3.3	217
ZS Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★☆☆	22.1.25	Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.	7.6	6.6	1422	41.5	-
IM6 100 Long Range	★★★½☆	29.10.25	Exceptional mixed with bland and irritating.	5.5	4.0	2340	3.0	299

MINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
John Cooper Works	★★★★☆	14.5.25	A proper hot hatch let down by a stiff ride and an impenetrable user interface.	5.8	4.5	1363	42.0	-
Countryman C Exclusive	★★★½☆	17.4.24	Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.	8.7	7.7	1618	46.9	-
Aceman SE Exclusive	★★★½☆	8.1.25	Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.	6.8	5.7	1756	3.1	162

MORGAN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Plus Four	★★★½☆	12.8.20	Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.	5.1	4.3	1013	54.0	-
Supersport	★★★★☆	6.8.25	Quite plainly the most polished Morgan to date yet still charismatic.	3.8	3.1	1180	44.2	-
Super 3	★★★★½	9.11.22	Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.	6.9	5.9	644	43.5	-

NISSAN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna	★★★½☆	29.1.20	Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.	11.9	11.8	1256	46.0	-
Qashqai E-Power Tekna+	★★★★☆	8.10.25	Hybrid SUV takes big strides, not least on real-world efficiency.	7.6	6.1	1681	48.8	-
Ariya 87kWh Evolve	★★★½☆	26.10.22	Surprisingly traditional and luxurious although not wholly successful.	8.2	6.4	2109	-	-
X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna	★★★★☆	22.2.23	Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.	6.6	6.0	1947	33.8	-

OMODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5 1.6 TGDI Comfort	★★½☆☆	20.11.24	Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.	7.4	6.3	1474	38.2	-

PEUGEOT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-208 Allure Premium	★★★★☆	6.5.20	Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV	-	-	1455	-	-
308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT	★★★★☆	25.5.22	A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.	9.5	9.2	1358	55.3	-
408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8	★★★★☆	11.10.23	Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.	8.2	7.3	1746	42.1	40
508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto	★★★★☆	24.10.18	Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.	8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8	★★★★☆	8.7.20	This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-

TOP 3

BEST ELECTRIC SUVs

1 Skoda Enyaq

2 Tesla Model Y

3 Kia EV9

SCAN THE
CODE TO SEE
THE TOP 10

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE	★★★★☆	5.5.21	Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-
e-2008 GT Line	★★★½☆	30.9.20	Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.	9.5	8.9	1638	-	-
e-3008 73kWh Allure	★★★½☆	4.8.24	Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.	8.5	7.1	2132	-	219
5008 Hybrid 136 GT	★★★☆☆	12.2.25	Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.	9.9	9.4	1736	44.0	-

POLESTAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 BST Edition 270	★★★½☆	12.4.23	A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.	4.5	3.4	2161	-	188
3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition	★★★★☆	12.2.25	Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.	4.6	3.8	2610	2.3	235
4 Long Range Single Motor	★★★☆☆	24.9.25	Electric crossover is desirable but something of a missed opportunity.	6.8	5.5	2246	2.5	310

PORSCHE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
718 Boxster	★★★★½	8.6.16	Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.	5.4	4.3	1395	35.9	-
718 Cayman S	★★★★½	10.8.16	Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.	4.8	3.9	1430	-	-
718 Cayman GT4 RS	★★★★★	14.9.22	A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.	3.9	3.0	1444	27.1	-
911 Carrera S	★★★★½	3.9.25	Supercar quick but gloriously rounded with it.	3.0	2.5	1600	34.5	-
911 Carrera T	★★★★☆	30.8.23	Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.	4.9	3.8	1456	39.1	-
911 Carrera GTS	★★★★½	5.3.25	Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.	2.8	2.6	1607	34.3	-
911 Turbo S	★★★★½	10.8.22	Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.	2.5	2.0	1640	36.3	-
911 GT3 PDK	★★★★½	11.8.21	Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.	3.4	2.7	1430	29.2	-
911 GT3 RS	★★★★½	22.11.23	Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.	3.2	2.5	1476	26.7	-
911 Dakar	★★★★☆	10.1.24	Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.	3.3	2.6	1660	36.0	-
911 S/T	★★★★★	3.7.24	Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.	3.7	2.6	1408	30.9	-
Macan Electric	★★★★☆	13.8.25	Well rounded in every sense and not without quietly executed driver appeal.	5.2	4.2	2262	3.0	219
Macan Turbo Electric	★★★½☆	19.2.25	Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.	3.0	2.5	-	2.1	219
Cayenne S	★★★★½	21.2.24	Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.	5.0	4.3	2256	28.8	-
Cayenne Turbo	★★★★☆	5.9.18	As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.	3.9	3.4	2307	31.5	-
Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid	★★★½☆	27.5.20	Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.	-	-	2490	-	-
Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé	★★★★☆	20.7.22	Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.	3.1	2.7	2251	26.1	-
Panamera 4 E-Hybrid	★★★★☆	22.1.25	Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.	3.8	2.4	2370	30.1	29
Taycan Turbo S	★★★★½	30.10.24	Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.	2.6	1.9	2356	2.7	233

TOP 3

BEST PHEV EXEC COMPANY CARS

1 BMW 530e

2 Mercedes-Benz E300e

3 Volvo V90 T6

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

RENAULT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Clio TCe 100 Iconic	★★★★½	27.11.19	Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.	11.6	10.9	1138	56.9	-
4 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic	★★★★☆	16.7.25	Charismatic but grown-up, the reborn 4 is a real contender.	8.2	7.5	1493	3.3	182
5 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic Five	★★★★½	12.3.25	Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game.	7.7	7.2	1461	3.1	166
Megane E-Tech Techno	★★★½☆	23.11.22	Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.	6.9	5.4	1688	-	198
Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC	★★★½☆	18.3.20	Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.	9.4	9.2	1363	53.1	-
Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition	★★★½☆	13.10.21	Eminently sensible but unspectacular.	11.0	10.1	1365	58.3	-
Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range	★★★★☆	26.6.24	The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.	8.1	6.3	1916	-	313
Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine	★★★½☆	19.7.23	Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.	8.5	6.9	1696	43.5	-

ROLLS-ROYCE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghost Series II Black Badge	★★★★½	25.6.25	Only flirts with sporting appeal, and gives up no Rolls accomplishments in doing so.	4.5	3.6	2576	25.8	-
Phantom	★★★★★	4.4.18	The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.	5.5	4.4	2780	28.4	-
Spectre	★★★★½	20.12.23	Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.	4.1	3.1	2935	-	245
Cullinan Black Badge	★★★★☆	19.2.20	Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.	4.9	4.2	2739	23.6	-

SEAT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★½	19.7.17	Shows rivals how it's done – in most respects.	10.0	10.0	1047	55.6	-
Leon eHybrid FR	★★★½☆	2.12.20	Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.	7.2	6.2	1558	46.3	26
Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★☆	15.11.17	Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.	10.5	10.7	1149	40.9	-
Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG	★★★☆☆	25.10.23	Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.	8.9	8.0	1396	44.4	-

SKODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort	★★★★½	9.2.22	Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.	9.9	9.7	1117	58.7	-
Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG	★★★½☆	31.7.19	Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.	7.9	7.3	1200	52.9	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG	★★★★☆	2.9.20	Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.	8.4	8.7	1510	73.0	-
Octavia Estate vRS	★★★★☆	29.1.25	A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.	5.9	4.8	-	37.6	-
Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate	★★★★★	17.7.24	The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.	8.4	8.2	1673	68.7	-
Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout	★★★½☆	30.1.19	Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.	8.9	9.6	1629	47.1	-
Elroq 85 Edition	★★★★½	19.3.25	Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV.	6.1	5.0	2085	3.5	246
Enyaq iV 80 Lounge	★★★★☆	18.8.21	Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.	8.3	7.8	2098	-	262

SMART

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
#1 Premium	★★★½☆	8.11.23	Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.	5.6	4.6	1861	-	229
#3 Premium	★★★½☆	15.5.24	Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.	5.7	4.9	1832	-	205

SUBARU

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring	★★★½☆	28.2.24	Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.	10.4	10.4	1620	45.3	-
Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring	★★★½☆	27.9.23	A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.	9.3	8.7	1690	42.8	-
Solterra AWD Touring	★★★☆☆	15.3.23	A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.	6.7	6.2	2051	-	169

SUZUKI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT	★★★★½	7.4.21	Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.	6.4	5.8	1966	44.4	48

TESLA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Standard Range Plus	★★★★☆	4.9.19	Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.	5.8	4.7	1633	-	156
Model 3 Long Range	★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range Rear-Wheel Drive	★★★★☆	27.8.25	Evolution keeps Model Y nicely on the boil – for now.	5.7	4.3	1903	3.2	315
Model S P90D	★★★★⯪	20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid	★★★⯪☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D	★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition	★★★⯪☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design	★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack	★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports	★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
Prius Plug-in Design	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Better late than never for best Prius to date.	6.6	5.6	1542	56.1	46
bZ4X AWD Vision	★★★⯪☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Land Cruiser 2.8 D-4D 204 Invincible	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Remains supremely tough but now has added kerb appeal and drivability.	10.3	10.3	2503	30.7	-
Mirai Design Premium	★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro	★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport	★★★⯪☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto	★★★⯪☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line	★★★⯪☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite	★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto	★★★⯪☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland Hybrid GS	★★★⯪☆	27.8.25	Spacious, functional, efficient and good value, yet neither grand nor lovely.	9.8	9.3	1623	52.2	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy	★★★⯪☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE	★★★★⯪	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+	★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG	★★★★⯪	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style	★★★★⯪	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI	★★★⯪☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	-	47.2	-
Golf R	★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life	★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake	★★★⯪☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match	★★★★⯪	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
ID 7 GTX Tourer	★★★☆☆	13.8.25	Sporty electric estate is appealing but not the product the GTX brand needs.	5.3	4.6	2353	2.9	241
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG	★★★★⯪	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG	★★⯪☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line	★★★⯪☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max	★★★⯪☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech	★★★⯪☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance	★★★⯪☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG	★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style	★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro	★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600	★★★⯪☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB	★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sibling car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus	★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate	★★★⯪☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition	★★★★⯪	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger siblings, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 T8 Ultra	★★★⯪☆	15.10.25	Volvo's crowd pleaser is still classy and spacious, though far from cutting edge.	4.6	4.1	2145	34.3	40
XC90 B5 AWD Ultra Bright	★★★⯪☆	2.7.25	Still a mature, versatile and wilfully unspectacular choice.	8.0	7.5	2117	37.0	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯪	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯪	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

XPENG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G6 RWD Standard Range	★★★⯪☆	26.2.25	Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.	6.8	6.2	2067	3.3	208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Jaecoo 8 Early 2026

ICE flagship SUV goes big on interior tech and kit and should undercut its European rivals.

MG S6 EV Early 2026

Bigger sibling to S5 EV will be priced between that crossover and the upmarket new IM6.

AUTOCAR IMAGE

BMW i3 Early 2026

New electric 3 Series will offer more than 500 miles of range and charging at up to 400kW.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love...
DRIVING A VAN

BY MATT SAUNDERS

They're not fast, quiet, smooth, desirable or – in many obvious ways, at least – remotely 'nice'. They don't have enticing engines or inviting interiors. They're not always easy to fit into a parking space and are hopeless on the supermarket run. Very often they don't even have enough seats. Yet there's something a bit noble – wonderful, even – about driving a van.

Don't be fooled: the best vans are more fun to drive than many cars

When you're in one, you invariably have a practical reason to be. And because that's what you're focused on, you don't expect to enjoy yourself. Yet somehow you do. It's a bit like borrowing a set of plumber's spanners from a friend so you can fix your wobbly bathroom tap and discovering that they're so clever that you break them out for almost anything. Changing a light bulb. Opening a high window. Scratching yourself in that hard-to-reach spot.

Big vans are the best. Climbing up high behind the wheel, for a start, makes you feel like Jerry Reed in Smokey and the Bandit. The seat and driving position you find there is always surprisingly comfortable and well laid out. Vans always have a healthy supply of storage cubbies and armrests. And because they sit you up so high in front of such a huge windscreen, you get a fantastic view of the road ahead, to make up for the non-existent one backwards in the rear-view mirror. The gearlever is generally positioned high on the fascia, too, like in an old Civic Type R.

Soon enough, you discover the steering lock. There's loads of it. That means plenty of arm-twirling is called for on the big, raked steering wheel – but that just makes you feel like Ari Vatanen as you swing into your driveway.

High seat and clear view out make manoeuvring easy

The main point is that, although they're big, vans can be surprisingly wieldy. And slotting them backwards perfectly into any marked bay, based only on what you can see in your elephantine door mirrors, brings a particular sort of satisfaction. If you get the chance to tow with one, it's as if you've graduated to some master level of driving proficiency – like you deserve an MBE or something.

> **"It's like graduating to a master level of driving proficiency"**

At speed, there's still more to like. The elevated view down the road over the cars in front. The accessible torque of the diesel engine, the effective use of which keeps both your brain and your limbs engaged. And the willingness of the thing to whizz along, down country roads and around bends, at a rate that you just wouldn't have credited.

Big vans look like they should fall over themselves when shown a corner, but they don't. The long wheelbase and particular suspension geometry makes them inherently stable – so that they can be loaded to the gunwales and remain safe, obviously. But lightly loaded, they carry speed amusingly well. Anyone who has ever been harried along by a carpet fitter in a rush to get home for the football can tell you that much.

The way that modern vans have become so much better equipped, more comfortable, more refined and more cleverly kitted out than their equivalents used to be decades ago only enhances the appeal – to me, at least.

There's a van rental place within a short stroll of my house, and I like to keep myself abreast of his latest arrivals – and my 'man and van' services have been used a few times this year. Thanks to the vehicles in question, they invariably come with a broad smile.

What we did this week

TOY-OTA TREAT

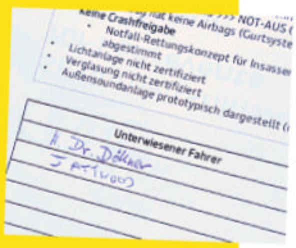
What do you choose at a vending machine? Wispa? Quavers? Caramac? Always an agonising choice – but nowhere more so than in Japan, where 'gashapon' machines selling small toys and games are on almost every corner. My brother got me a surprisingly detailed little Z20 Toyota Soarer in Kyoto for the equivalent of 50p. **FELIX PAGE**

ESTATE OF ELATION

Armed with the new BMW M3 CS Touring, I booked a trip to Wales with a mate in his E92 M3 and snapper Jack Harrison in his lightly hopped-up Toyota MR2. The Brecon Beacons proved about as perfect a proving ground for this wild wagon as you're likely to find, and all three of us had unshakeable grins at the end of the day. **SAM PHILLIPS**

NOT ABOVE THE LAW

Driving an Audi prototype vehicle such as the Concept C seen on p46 requires signing a waiver, no matter how important you are. So when I put pen to paper to acknowledge the risks of driving a one-off, my scribble went just underneath that of the last person to drive the car: Audi CEO Gernot Döllner. **JAMES ATTWOOD**



NOT-AUS (
hat keine Airbags (Gurtsyste
- Keine Crashfreigabe
- Notfall-Rettungskonzept für Insassen abgestimmt
- Lichtanlage nicht zertifiziert
- Verglasung nicht zertifiziert
- Außensoundanlage prototypisch dargestellt (

Unterwiesener Fahrer

A. Dr. Döllner
J Attwood

GETTY IMAGES

AUTOCAR PODCAST

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley
Matt Prior

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